University of Alberta

Barriers and supports to child care accreditation in Alberta

by

Margaret Anne Golberg ©

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Abstract

Child care accreditation establishes quality standards of child care practice, and makes these visible to the public. In Alberta, the provincial government, through the Children's Services Department in collaboration with the Alberta Child Care Network established a child care accreditation agency in 2004. The history leading to the development of accreditation in Alberta and research on accreditation, and its associated advantages and disadvantages is reviewed. The qualitative study documented the response of child care directors/owners to accreditation as it was introduced in Alberta. The purpose of this study was to discover what potential barriers discourage participation and what factors support successful engagement in the accreditation process. A framework analysis design was chosen to facilitate the exploration of child care accreditation in Alberta, within the context of its development.

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CHAPTER 1: A FRAMEWORK ANALYSIS OF THE SUPPORTS AND BARRIERS TO CHILD CARE ACCREDITATION IN ALBERTA

Introduction

Child care accreditation is a process undertaken to determine if a child care program meets criteria of excellence in service provision. These criteria are externally established by an organization of child care professionals and/or a government body, based on research evidence of best practices in child care. The process is voluntary, but may be tied to government or other sources of funding. The criteria of excellence are established through consultation with child care service providers and professionals and experts in the field of early childhood. Adherence to standards is monitored by an accreditation agency. Child care accreditation establishes quality standards of child care practice, and makes these visible to the public. In Alberta, the provincial government, through the Children's Services Department in collaboration with the Alberta Child Care Network has established a child care accreditation agency.

This study documented the response of selected Alberta child care directors (including Executive Directors, Program Directors and Owner Directors) to accreditation as it was introduced in Alberta. The purpose of this study was to discover what potential barriers discourage participation and what factors support successful engagement in the accreditation process. A qualitative approach was chosen to assess barriers and supports and facilitate the exploration of child care accreditation in Alberta, within the context of its development. Because this study is of an applied research nature, looking specifically at the facilitation of accreditation in Alberta, a framework analysis design was selected.

Identification of Problem

The Alberta Ministry of Children's Services 2002- 2005 Business Plan identified strengthened standards and best practices in child care as necessary supports for parents. Quality child care is identified as being necessary to ensure parents are able to participate fully in the workforce and continue to contribute to the economy. Three programs were proposed within the Child Care Initiative: (a) Child Care Nutritional Program; (b) Respite Options for Families in Need; and (c) the Child Care Accreditation Program. " …the Alberta Child Care Initiative will help families in identifying and selecting the best child care setting for their children…" (Alberta Children's Services, 2003, p. 1). Accreditation establishes standards of best practice in child care, which programs voluntarily decide to undertake, versus licensing, which sets minimal, mandatory standards of health and safety (Morgan, 1982). Alberta is the first province in Canada to undertake an accreditation program.

Strengthening standards and encouraging best practices may be difficult however, given the issues faced by the child care sector in Alberta. The following passage highlights the Alberta child care context:

> In Alberta we face specific challenges in providing access to high quality, inclusive care. We have many vocal proponents and day care advocates in Alberta who argue tirelessly for the benefits of quality care for all children and families. However, the current public policy is that day care is an economic support- a service to be purchased by working families- rather than a family support.
>
> We continue to have some of the lowest training standards in the country. Levels of training are inconsistent and access to professional development is

> difficult. Staff wages are correspondingly low, with many child care providers working for little more than minimum wage. We have many more commercial day care centres than not-for-profit centres in Alberta, with all the attendant issues and divisions this creates in the early childhood community.
>
> Day care centres tend to be isolated from one another. As in other parts of the country, families are increasingly diverse, and their needs are increasing in intensity. Diversity issues are often compounded by poverty, with all its accompanying risks of poor health, developmental delay and failure at school. Edmonton is one of the most culturally diverse cities in the country and has one of the highest rates of child poverty (Hewes, 1998, p. 31).

Although an accreditation system in Alberta has the potential to bring public recognition of quality child care practice, it must be acknowledged that there are many factors inherent in the Alberta child care situation that may limit the movement towards better standards. Regulated child care programs have a recruitment and retention problem, associated with low remuneration levels and lack of public recognition of professional worth. Many programs really struggle to cover overhead costs such as rent while keeping fees affordable. Programs are isolated from one another by various issues such as distance, diversity, auspice and lack of infrastructure to support cohesive service delivery (Hewes, 1998). Accreditation, though voluntary, adds another challenge to a field already challenged by many issues.

Purpose of the Study

Accreditation is a voluntary process: it is unclear what has motivated child care programs to undertake the journey to accreditation. Child care directors take the lead role in that journey. " The centre director sets the standards and expectations for teaching staff to follow and sets the climate of the centre as both a caring and educational environment for children and as a workplace for staff" (Doherty, Lero, Goelman, LaGrange & Tougas, 2000. p. 173).

The purpose of this study was to discover what potential barriers discourage participation and what factors support successful engagement in the accreditation process. The interview questions aimed to identify the response to accreditation of child care directors and owners, during the phase that it was introduced in Alberta. The daycare directors/owners directly involved in the research interviews were provided an opportunity to reflect on their program practices, which in itself has value. "Reflection is characteristic of effective early childhood educators. It helps educators gain better perspective, insight and understanding" (Mayfield, 2001, p. 123). Because the success of the accreditation system will depend on the number of centres who voluntarily engage in becoming accredited, the study was designed to identify what meaningful incentives and supportive infrastructure need to be provided to child care directors/owners, to motivate them to successfully participate in the accreditation process. This information will be useful to the Alberta Association for Accreditation of Early Learning and Care Services, and the Alberta Resource Centre for Quality Enhancement (ARCQE). ARCQE was launched in January, 2005 as an agency to address the needs of early learning and care services throughout Alberta by providing training, tools, materials and resources in order to improve child development and parenting knowledge through the provision of high quality services. This study was intended as an initial exploration of best ways to support the implementation of accreditation in Alberta. It may also be of interest to child care professionals across Canada who are watching Alberta's accreditation initiative with great interest.

Research Questions

The main question guiding this study was: What supports or barriers are faced by daycare directors/owners, as they respond, whether positively or negatively, to the implementation of accreditation? (Directors/owners who have no interest or knowledge of the accreditation system were not included in the study). To address this question: I began the interview with the following: "I am interested in hearing your story about the complexities of the environment in which accreditation is to take place. Tell me about your response to the Alberta accreditation program."

Some supporting questions that arose out of the main question were:

- What are directors'/owners' perceptions of the accreditation process?
- What existing strengths do they feel their programs incorporate?
- What barriers exist that would prevent their centres from attaining accredited status?
- What will motivate child care directors/owners to participate in the accreditation program?
- What type of supports do they think their centre would require achieving accreditation status?
- What will enable them to initiate changes necessary to achieve accredited status?

Significance

This study is intended to have meaning and value to those daycare directors/owners who participated in it, by providing them with an opportunity to reflect on their child care practice and on the supports and barriers that they face in guiding their programs towards standards of quality practice. A wider audience of Alberta child care providers will share the results of this study through publication of a summary of results in the Early Childhood Professional Association Newsletter and possibly other early childhood publications. This research also has potential value to contribute to the services provided by Alberta Children's Services, the Alberta Association for Accreditation of Early Learning and Care Services and the Alberta Resource Centre for Quality Enhancement of Early Learning and Care Services. The findings may provide these agencies with some insights about ways to provide supports to help child care programs engage and succeed in the accreditation process.

CHAPTER 2: BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Canadian Policies and Values

In Canada, participation in child care is a norm for most young children (Doherty, 2000). A high percentage of Canadian mothers with young children work full time: in 1999, 67.9% of women whose youngest child was 3 years of age and 70.7% of women with a child between 3 and 5 years of age were engaged in full time employment (Statistics-Canada, 2000). Children spend many hours in child care during these early years. A child entering child care at the age of six months would receive 10,125 hours of care by age five as compared to 13,860 hours of class time from grades 1 through 12 (Doherty, 2000). Considering the number of children who participate in child care and the number of hours those children spend in child care, child care programs play a significant role in the development of young children in Canadian society.

" Early childhood services do not exist in isolation for they draw on the very nature of society and the socio/cultural political and economic contexts within which families live and work" (Goodfellow, 2002, p. 1). Despite the fact that most Canadian families with young children use some form of child care, there continues to be conflicting values about child care. For instance, there is no national child care policy (although it is under discussion at the time of writing) and access to affordable quality child care is very limited.

A study conducted by O'Hara (1998), using data from 1995 Statistics Canada, noted that Canadians hold very mixed values about work-family issues. For example, while 70% of Canadians feel that both spouses should contribute to family income, forty-six percent feel that a woman wants a home and children rather than a job. Sixty-three percent of Canadians believe that a young child will suffer if both parents work. Fifty percent of parents would stay home with children if they could afford it. On the other hand, seventy-six percent agree there should be a child care system available to all families, with costs shared by government and families and 90% agree on the following: jobs are the best answer to poverty; employers should increase efforts to provide a balance; and both parents in two-parent families need jobs to support their families (Michalski, 1999). Alan Mirabelli, quoted in O'Hara's report, comments: "What people would like, for instance- (is) to have one partner stay home and look after the children. But economic reality simply doesn't permit that" (O'Hara, 1998, p. 27). The current economic reality is that two income earners are needed to maintain a stable family income (Eichler, 1997). The fact that Canadians hold conflicting values about work and family is reflected in government policy and has repercussions in the working family's access to affordable, quality child care services.

As of 1998, close to 1.4 million Canadian children use child care services, but there are only about 500,000 regulated spaces. Unregulated family child care is the most common form of paid child care service (Beach, Bertrand, & Cleveland, 1998). Child care is provided in the child's home, in the home of a caregiver, in a child care centre or nursery school or in a combination of arrangements. Parents often choose care on the basis of cost and availability rather than what meets the family needs. There has been a 400% increase in use of child care services since 1967 (Beach et al., 1998). In 1998, the cost of raising a child from birth to age 18 was estimated at $160,000. About 33% of this cost was attributed to child care (Canadian Council on Social Development, 1998). There are various types of child care and various levels of quality within these. Findings of a number of studies of various types of child care indicate concern with the observed quality (Beach et al., 1998).

History Leading to the Accreditation System in Alberta

The development of an accreditation system for licensed family day homes and daycares in Alberta has arisen in the context of its unique child care history, alongside growing awareness of child care advocates of the need to promote quality in child care services.

In Canada, the federal government does not have direct jurisdiction over child care, and the history of child care and education varies by province and location. Daycares were originally called day nurseries or crèche. They were founded by religious organizations and women's charity organizations. The first was in Montreal in 1854, founded by the Roman Catholic church (Prentice, 2001). In Alberta, the first daycare was the Edmonton Crèche, opened in 1908, as a temporary or permanent residence for homeless children. It was run as a service project by a woman's club that included such prominent members as Emily Murphy and Nellie McClung. It closed in 1914 but reopened in 1929, under the sponsorship of Lady Rodney, to offer daytime care for working mothers. Until 1966, when it was reorganized, it was operated under the leadership of a registered nurse (Prochner, 2000). These early initiatives legitimized daycare and subsidized care as a community service need (Prentice, 2001).

Child care was gradually restructured as a social service during the 1950's, and began to receive federal funding in 1966 through the Canada Assistance Plan (Prochner, 2000). Through this funding, the federal government influenced the development of child care across the country. Both federal and provincial policy and funding initiatives have played a role in the type of services available and these vary widely from province to province (Beach et al., 1998). From the mid sixties, through the seventies, Edmonton and Calgary set high standards for their federally/municipally funded nonprofit centres resulting in recognition as "daycare leaders across Canada" (Prentice, 2001, p. 74). However, new policy directions lead to the province taking over control of funding and regulation of child care. Provincial daycare regulations were introduced in 1980, along with a universal operating allowance to offset the new requirements for more stringent staff-to-child ratios. Availability of operating allowance and subsidized child care, lead to many for-profit centres opening in Edmonton and Calgary, in a short period of time in the early eighties. Commercial operators became very influential in government planning for daycare during this period (Prentice, 2001).

In the 1990s, the government of Alberta began to phase out the operating allowance, with a complete elimination by 1999. The funding was redirected to child care subsidies for low-income families. Funding to child care decreased by 7% from 1994 to 2001. At the same time that funding was decreased; regulations were increased (Cleland, 2002), resulting in increased daycare fees.

Interest in accreditation of child care services first surfaced in Alberta in 1986, through the Alberta Association for Young Children (AAYC). This group advocated for quality child care and was frustrated with its lack of influence on government policy. AAYC saw accreditation as a means to supplement basic government licensing policy (Prentice, 2001). Accreditation of a child care program is a process undertaken to meet externally established criteria of excellence in service provision. A professional child care organization and/or government body determine these criteria. Although the process is voluntary, it may be tied to government or other source of funding, which is conditional to the accreditation standards being met. The criteria of excellence are established and monitored by an accreditation agency, through consultation with child care providers and professionals and experts in the field of early childhood (Golberg, 1999).

In the nineties, another provincial quality child care advocacy group, The Alberta Alliance for Family and Children's Services formed, with child care accreditation as one of its primary goals. In 1999, a proposal for accreditation of licensed day homes and daycare centres was published to support this goal (Golberg, 1999). The system proposed was based on the first child care accreditation system in Canada, which had been developed in 1997, by a group of nonprofit daycare directors in the Edmonton area, who formed a group called the Child and Family Resource Association (CAFRA). At this same time, there was a growing concern in the child care community about attracting staff to work in child care. Although work environments vary substantially among various child care settings, there are common problems: compensation levels are low, benefits are scarce, working conditions are often difficult, health and safety concerns abound and career opportunities are limited for most caregivers (Beach et al., 1998). In Alberta, there is a 45% turnover of staff per year, the highest rate in Canada (Doherty et al., 2000). Lobbying by the Alberta Child Care Network, a provincial association for child care associations, which meets on an occasional basis with the Ministry of Children's Services, resulted in the formation of a working committee of child care stakeholders, government representatives, and a consulting company, to examine the daycare staffing crisis and to recommend "service improvement and day care environmental stabilization". The resulting report from Cleland (2002) recommended accreditation as a means to improve quality of services, to increase accountability for investment of tax dollars and to impact market forces by identifying low-quality programs (Cleland, 2002, p. 2).

Around the same time, new policy and funding related to children and families was being considered at a federal level. This resulted in the Early Childhood Development Initiative, a federal policy and funding directed toward support of children and families, which the provinces signed in 2000 (Social Union Framework, 2000). The four pillars of the agreement include: (a) promoting healthy pregnancy, birth and infancy; (b) improving parenting and family supports; (c) strengthening early childhood development, learning and care; and (d) strengthening community supports. Child care falls under several of these pillars, because it includes providing family support, strengthening early childhood development and providing community support. Each province determines which programs will receive the benefit of this funding.

Following that, the Social Union initiative came about as the umbrella under which governments in Canada are concentrating their efforts to renew and modernize Canadian social policy. (See http://www.socialunion.ca/ecd-framework_e.htm). Building on the 2000 Early Childhood Development Initiative (ECDI) agreement to improve and expand early childhood development programs and services, Federal, Provincial and Territorial governments agreed to invest additional funds for regulated early learning and child care programs for children under six. This agreement was signed March 13th, 2003. Under this Agreement, the Government of Canada is providing $900 million over five years to support provincial and territorial government investments in early learning and child care. In the context of this framework, regulated programs are defined as programs that meet quality standards that are established and monitored by provincial/territorial governments. Types of investments could include capital and operating funding, fee subsidies, wage enhancements, training, professional development and support, quality assurance, and parent information and referral. Programs and services that are part of the formal school system will not be included in this initiative. Each government will determine its priorities within this initiative. Governments committed to report annually to Canadians on investments and progress in the area of early childhood development. Governments recognize the importance of evaluation in determining the effectiveness and outcomes of initiatives in early learning and child care and agree to work together to develop an evaluation framework within one year of federal funding being received.

In Alberta, funding has been directed to a variety of programs, including child care subsidy, integrated child care, and a move toward accreditation of child care services, based on the recommendations of the Cleland report. Funding of accreditation to date has included funding of a pre-accreditation phase and the development of the Alberta Child Care Accreditation Program. The design and pilot testing of the system were contracted out, in July 2003, to “The Partners”, an affiliation of the Canadian Child Care Federation and the Alberta Child Care Network Association. From September 2003 to November 2003, The Partners met with day home and daycare representatives across the province to obtain feedback on their proposed agency design and criteria for accreditation standards. The actual accreditation system was launched in November 2004, as the Alberta Association for Accreditation of Early Learning and Care Services. (See http://www.abccaccred.ca).

CHAPTER 3: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

This review examines child care accreditation, its role in establishing quality standards, as well as a review of its advantages and disadvantages.

Accreditation involves public recognition of meeting certain standards. For example, the Association of Accrediting Agencies of Canada defines accreditation as "the process to determine and to certify the achievement and the maintenance of reasonable and appropriate national standards of education for professionals" (Association of Accrediting Agencies of Canada, 2003, p. 1). One of its member agencies, the Canadian Technology Accreditation Board defines accreditation as "the positive end-result of a stringent in depth evaluation process" (Canadian Technology Accreditation Board, 2002, p. 1). These definitions point out several important aspects of accreditation. Standards are determined by a professional organization. A process of self-study occurs within the program seeking accreditation. There is an external review of the program. Positive results of the evaluation process result in an end product: status as an accredited program.

Accreditation of child care programs incorporates all the above elements. It has been defined as:

> a process by which a representative body, recognized by both the service community and the community in general, establishes standards for services. The standards are above the minimum regulatory requirements of the government. Programs can apply on a voluntary basis for evaluation against

> standards and if found to meet or surpass them, are granted a certificate which recognizes this fact (Doherty-Derkowski, 1995, p. 113).

Child care accreditation is an ongoing process wherein the child care program engages in a process of continual self-improvement, not just a one-time evaluation. High standards of professional practice are established and evaluated through a process involving child care professionals and experts in the field of early childhood. The standards themselves are then monitored for effectiveness, efficiency and validity, in a process of continual improvement. Accreditation is administered by an accrediting agency, which is recognized by the child care community and the general public as representing the best interests of children, families and the child care profession. This agency undertakes the granting of accreditation status, the continuous cycle of examination and improvement of the process and standards, and the publicity necessary to convey to parents and the public, the importance of choosing and supporting quality child care. The granting of accreditation status signifies to parents and the public that the child care program is providing quality child care.

Accreditation Differs from Licensing

Accreditation differs from licensing of child care programs in a number of ways. Licensing establishes and regulates minimum, mandatory government standards with the intention of preventing harm to children enrolled in child care programs. Voluntary adherence to professionally sponsored, higher standards of practice is engendered by accreditation. The goal of licensing is to maintain compliance to regulations, whereas the goal of accreditation is to recognize achievement of quality standards. Non-compliance to child care licensing regulations may result in the removal of the license to operate a child care program, whereas failure to achieve accreditation standards results in denial of accreditation status (Morgan 1982).

Purpose and Functions of Accreditation

Through promotion of high standards of professional practice, the ultimate goal of accreditation is to improve the daily experience of the child, within the child care setting. " Accreditation systems are not designed to handle all the issues and challenges that the early childhood field wishes to address" (Goffin 2001b, p. 53). Accreditation is meant to serve as a tool to work toward improved practice, but it is not able to directly address problems within the child care profession, such as low wages, low levels of training, high turnover and lack of public recognition of the roles and responsibilities of child care professionals. The two central purposes of accreditation are: (1) to serve as a process of achieving quality care, and (2) to serve as the product of achieving accreditation status (Ethiel, 1997).

First, as a process, a primary purpose of accreditation is to supply child care providers with a means of reflecting on child care practice, of questioning and establishing professional standards. In this way, accreditation moves child care providers to a new level of professionalism.

> Added to this are new understandings about early childhood development and the necessity for professionals to be knowledgeable and articulate about current thinking in relation to children's learning and appreciative of the cultural contexts that shape the nature of learning environments. These factors, and the need to meet additional statutory and regulatory requirements, have the potential to create

> expectations and demands on early childhood professionals not previously experienced (Goodfellow, 2002, p. 4).

Accreditation serves as a framework for child care professionals to undertake program evaluation and to make program improvements in a very structured way (Ethiel, 1997).

Second, as a product, accreditation serves as a means of distinguishing between poor quality and high quality programs, allowing parents to make an informed choice in selecting a program for their child. It also provides a public report on the standards of quality and the process of improvements undertaken and/or achieved by a child care program. Community funding agencies, private corporations and/or government, when requested to invest in a program, normally require this type of public accountability. The accreditation report affords an opportunity for the community to invest in quality child care programs and for child care programs to make visible the efforts they have undertaken to provide a quality program for children. When government funding is attached to accreditation status, it provides assurance for taxpayers that tax money is being directed to quality services (Bryce, 1996).

The functional aspects of accreditation are carried out by the accreditation agency. These functions include: granting a seal of approval; providing a report to the consumer; conferring an underlying assurance label; and providing a therapeutic prescription (Goffin, 2001b). In summary, accreditation provides a strategy for improving reflection on child care practice and for promoting high quality standards through public accountability.

What are High Quality Standards in Child Care?

Defining what constitutes high quality child care is a challenging task, considering there are many perspectives as to what constitutes quality. As noted by the European Commission Child Care Network:

> Any definition of quality is to an extent transitory; understanding quality and arriving at quality indicators is a dynamic and continuous process of reconciling the emphasis of different interest groups. It is not a prescriptive exercise. On the other hand it needs to be a detailed exercise which is of direct practical use to those working with young children (Balageur, Mestres, & Penn, 1990, p. 5).

In other words, while it may be difficult to define quality child care, it is important to those who work in the early childhood field to have a practical understanding of what they are trying to achieve. The initiation of accreditation by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) in 1980 was prompted by various concerns about early childhood programs, including the lack of a definition of quality care (Bredekamp & Glowacki, 1996).

Katz (1993) outlined five perspectives from which quality may be considered. First is the top-down perspective, which examines such factors as the equipment and setting provided for the children. Second is the bottom-up perspective, which is the experience of the child within the child care program. The experience of the family is a third perspective, termed the outside-inside perspective. The fourth is the inside perspective, which is the experience of the staff of the child care program. The fifth is the outside perspective, which is the program in relation to the community. Incorporating the perspectives of children, families and program providers about what constitutes quality child care can contribute to a broader understanding of quality and design of program to meet community needs (Ceglowski & Bacigalupa, 2002).

A definition of what constitutes quality needs to incorporate views of stakeholders, to reflect culture, history, early childhood discourse and current knowledge of children, protecting their rights and best interests. Stakeholders include children, parents, families, employers, providers and society. "The process of defining quality involves a complex combination of prioritising goals set by various stakeholders in society"(Smith, 1996, p. 86). For the purposes of this research, high quality child care is defined as a program that supports and assists the child's well-being and development, as well as supporting and complementing the family in its child-rearing role (Doherty-Derkowski, 1995).

Indicators of Quality Child Care

The concept of accreditation arises from a modernist perspective: that is, " a search for definitive, and universal criteria, certainty and order" (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999). With the underlying assumption that high quality practice will lead to better outcomes for children, comes a search for what are those best practices, what indicators exist to demonstrate that those best practices are occurring in the child care centre, and how can that be observed, recorded and rated? The identification of quality indicators, which form the basis of selection of quality criteria, is based on research evidence. Child care accreditation therefore, is highly based on the perspective of early childhood research. It makes visible to parents and the public what the early childhood sector has identified as quality care, and places value on offering children programs that provide best practices in early childhood programming.

"Child care quality is the result of a dynamic interaction of different kinds of variables" (Goelman, Doherty, Lero, LaGrange & Tougas, 2000, p. 76). Research in early childhood settings has indicated that certain factors predict higher levels of quality child care. Although these factors work in an inter-related, synergistic fashion, they have typically been examined separately. For the purpose of this review, three categories of variables have been identified: structural, process and contextual.

Structural. Structural variables are those easiest to examine and tend to be those that fall under child care regulations, such as child/staff ratio, group size, training of child care provider, and physical environment. High quality programs offer small child/staff ratios and group size, which allows interaction to be frequent, personal and individual (Clarke-Stewart, Vandell, Burchinal, O'Brien,& McCartney, 2002; Goelman et al., 2000; Helburn, 1995; Howes, Smith & Galinsky, 1995; Peth-Pierce, 1998; Phillips, Mekos, Scarr, McCartney & Abott-Shinn, 2000). Formal, college level education specific to early childhood is associated with appropriate teacher behaviour and effective teaching and results in better outcomes on tests of cognitive and language development (Devine-Hawkins, 1981; Doherty-Derkowski, 1995; Goelman et al., 2000; Whitebrook, Howes & Phillips, 1990). Finally, the quality of the physical environment is related to the well-being of children, parents and staff (Koralek, Colker & Dodge, 1995; Peth-Pierce, 1998).

Process. More difficult to examine, but very important are process variables: what is the daily experience of the child, how do staff interact with them and with each other? Process variables include: caregiver/child interaction, beliefs of caregivers, program planning and curriculum, caregiver/parent interaction and staff leadership. Research has demonstrated that children have better outcomes on tests of language and cognitive development in child care settings where individualized care and warm, sensitive interaction is provided by caregivers (Clarke- Stewart et al., 2002; Doherty-Derkowski, 1995; NICHD, 1998). Child-centered beliefs center on the idea that learning is active and should be initiated by the child. The child care provider encourages children to choose and develop their own learning and the child's social and emotional needs are considered more important than academic learning (Marcon, 1994). Child-centered beliefs result in positive care-giving (Clarke-Stewart et al., 2002; Peth-Pierce, 1998). High quality child care programs offer more learning opportunities through programming that focuses on joint attention/shared cognition (Carr, 1998). Appropriateness of learning activities enhances socio-emotional and cognitive development for children (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Peth-Pierce, 1998). Children's success in later school grades is improved by active, child-initiated learning experiences in preschool (Marcon, 2002). Some classroom content and process similar to those of traditional schooling helps facilitate transition to school. Ongoing child-focused communication between parents and caregivers is another indicator of quality care (Frede, 1995). Leadership within the child care program influences values and quality practices (Frede, 1995; Jorde-Bloom, 1992). Staff need the support of their program director to reflect on and improve practice (Hatherly, 1999).

Contextual. Other variables that exist within the child care context, such as staff salaries, and level of funding, have also been found to influence the quality of care provided. Contextual variables include: auspice, staff turnover, level of funding to the program, staff salaries and benefits, and level of standards and regulations. Nonprofit auspice is associated with higher quality care (Doherty, Friendly & Forer, 2002; Friesen,1995; Helburn, 1995; Mitchell, 2002). High quality programs have less staff turnover (Whitebrook et al., 1990). Children in centres with high turnover spent less time in social activities and more time in aimless wandering (Helburn, 1995). Child care centres with subsidized rent and/or utilities demonstrate higher quality care, higher wages and less staff turnover (Goelman et al., 2000; Scarr, Phillips, McCartney, & Abbott-Shinn, 1993). Higher parent fees were also associated with higher quality child care (Goelman et al., 2000). Higher staff wages are associated with the provision of developmentally appropriate practice, lower ratios and lower staff turnover. Favourable wages and working conditions are linked to overall quality (Goelman et al., 2000; Scarr et al., 1993; Whitebrook, Howes & Phillips, 1989). These financial dimensions of quality such as higher parent fees and higher wages contribute to less staff turnover, resulting in teacher-child attachment which in turn results in better program quality and child development (Phillips et al., 2000). Higher child care licensing standards, regulations and enforcement is linked to higher quality practice (Helburn, 1995; Howes et al., 1995; NICHD, 1999), because standards and compliance to standards are closely monitored.

Child care accreditation standards and criteria typically address structural variables and process variables. Contextual variables are variables that depend on the community and government policy, the economic well being of a community, and the community attitude toward child care, as well as the child care program itself. Therefore, they are very difficult to address within the accreditation standards.

Developmental Theory Influences Child Care Policy and Practice

Early childhood policy and practice, including accreditation, are influenced from a number of theories that deal with how children develop and learn. Historically, there were two contrasting views of human nature: the nativist and the nurturist (Seefeldt & Barbour, 1998). The nativist view is based on the idea that the child is genetically pre-programmed to unfold in certain ways. This philosophy began with Rousseau and has continued in the work of Gessell, Erickson and Chomsky. In early childhood practice, this philosophy results in the view that children need to play and develop creatively, while the adult's role is to offer help, but not interference with the child (Bruce, 1997). The nurturist view arises from the philosophy of John Locke, and sees the child as passive and receptive, with learning arising as a result of interaction with the environment (Seefeldt & Barbour, 1998). The behaviourist theories of Watson and Skinner arose for this view. The role of the adult in this view is to identify and select experiences to shape the development of the child (Bruce, 1997). An alternate and most popular view arose from these two perspectives. It is based on the assumption that both nature and nurture influence child development (White & Coleman, 2000). This view arises from the philosophy of Kant and Popper and the work of Piaget, Brofenbrenner and Vygotsky. This perspective is supported by research in the areas of social constructivist and the socio-cultural perspective, as well as by brain research. In this view, the role of the adult is critical, in helping children develop, and maximizing the use of the environmental and cultural setting (Bruce, 1997). Developmental theory arises within the interactionist view, based on the concept that development takes place in an orderly, sequential and increasingly more complex level of functioning as the child advances in age, and takes place across three domains of development: physical, cognitive and social-emotional. Principles deriving from this theory include: development is holistic; children develop at their own pace, children develop best in a supportive environment; and children develop within an ecological context. The early childhood profession is North America is strongly influenced by the NAEYC guidelines on developmentally appropriate practice (DAP), which cover curriculum, adult-child interactions, relations between home and school and developmental assessment of young children. "The importance of the DAP philosophy in defining early childhood practices is perhaps best reflected in a movement by NAEYC to accredit early childhood programs that voluntarily meet DAP standards" (White and Coleman, 1998, p. 70).

The concept of accreditation is embedded in developmental theory. The underlying assumption is that high quality practice will lead to better developmental outcomes for children. The research on quality indicators and criteria arising from quality indicators looks at how these factors influence the child's development.

Exploring the Postmodern Views of Quality in Child Care

The search for a way to define quality that can be observed and measured through accreditation standards and criteria arises from the modernist perspective. The quality quest within early childhood settings in America has arisen within the assumptions of developmental psychology, which espouses a positivistic, decontextualized and universal approach to children (Kvale, 1992). The postmodern movement not only challenges the established child development research, it provides a new paradigm for evaluating the customs and institutions that influence children and questioning our ideas about children and childhood (Zimiles, 2000). The postmodern perspective emphasizes diversity and multiple perspectives rather than a search for definitive criteria (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999). "The very concept of quality does need questioning- because there is a problem with the concept of quality" (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999, p. 4). The problem is that quality is subjective: it arises from a subjective view that is shaped by socio-political factors, and cultural and personal values. Once quality is defined through a set of standards and criteria, which is the goal of accreditation, it is no longer inclusive of diversity, multiple perspectives and contextual issues (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999).

The concept, assumptions and practices arising from child development theory have been criticized, by Canella (1997), as unjust and hostile to children, because they are based on multiple forms of privilege and subjugation, social regulation, a hierarchy of human beings and a deficiency model of human beings. Canella (1997) views child-centered programs as being imposed by adults without the input of children. Likewise, she sees the beliefs of early childhood education based in developmental psychology's understanding and explanation of the child being imposed upon children, silencing them and assuming there is one best way to learn. Within this context, there is also a questioning of the acceptance of Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP). First developed in 1987, by the NAEYC, this publication was intended for use by early childhood educators, to "help interpret accreditation standards and, especially, in response to the trend toward a push-down curriculum, and away from child-imitated learning and play in preschool and kindergarten" (Bredekamp, n.d.). It was developed to meet the need for a shared vision and common standards of professional practice for the early childhood field (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). The original version received criticism because it overemphasized the individual child and did not recognize the role of the teacher, the relationship with family or the role of culture (Bredekamp, n.d.). DAP was based on individualistic, positivistic assumptions and ignored the "role of personal voices, cultures, caring and care-taking, interconnectedness and personal responsibility" (Jipson, 1991, p. 133). It was critiqued as coming from a white-middle class perspective that worked for advantaged, Anglo children and not for children from other backgrounds who did not have the knowledge skills and dispositions to benefit from the DAP approach (O'Brien, 2000). The revision in 1997 involved much consultation and attempted to reflect learning from the Reggio Emilia approach, including social construction of knowledge, the role of teacher as co-constructor of knowledge and the importance of parental involvement in the early childhood program (Bredekamp, n.d.). But from the postmodern perspective, there is no need for a common standard: it is more important to develop a reflective stance and to value diverse perspectives and local circumstance.

Lubeck (1998) critiques the revised version of DAP as being contradictory because it attempts to build a shared vision of practice, while at the same time emphasizing culture and diversity. She questions the notion that we can hold diverse views within a common experience, or if this renders obscure the differences that we have. She suggests that instead of writing down rules and agreeing on standards, those in the early childhood field should build ways to have intense, sustained conversation about practice in context and over time (Lubeck, 1998). Canella (1997) proposes themes of social justice, listening to children and development of educator's critical thinking skills as means of improving early education. Another proposal is to educate early childhood educators through "engaged pedagogy" to become reflective practitioners, who analyze ways that inequality is maintained, and work toward social justice, though concrete actions in the classroom (O'Brien, 2000). These recommendations are also put forward by Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999). They propose "the discourse of meaning making" (p. 106), which is a means of constructing understandings through an interactive and dialogic process of critical enquiry and study of actual practice. Included in this vision is the notion of early childhood institutions as forums of civil society, where "children and adults participate together in projects of social, cultural, political and economic significance" (p. 73). The "discourse of meaning making" is subject to disagreement and does not require consensus. While both the discourse on quality and the discourse on meaning making seek answers as to what "good" is going on in the early childhood community, there is a different understanding of "good": the postmodern notion of "good" is based on discursive practice, contextualized in time and space and open to negotiation. The discourse on quality from the modernist perspective is based on seeking and sharing a common understanding of "good" practice. Elkind (2000) sees the postmodern challenge to early childhood educators as being able to combine the modern concept of developmentally appropriate practice with the postmodern focus on individually appropriate practice that values ethnic, cultural, racial and gender differences.

Why Promote High Quality Standards?

Development of various policies and strategies to support the provision of quality child care is important because the child care experience impacts not only children, but families and society as well. Accreditation serves as one strategy to improve child care practice, thereby contributing to better access to child care programs that can provide an environment for optimal development, and family support. These in turn lead to better protection of children's rights, and better contributions of children and families to society.

Child development. There are many factors that influence a child's development. These include "genetic endowment, parental characteristics, family variables, neighbourhood characteristics, and the child's experiences outside the home, such as child care" (Doherty, 1998, p. 1). Various child care research demonstrates that child care variables do play a role in the child's development, alongside the many other variables previously cited (Doherty, 1998). High quality child care can positively influence child development, while poor quality care can have detrimental effects (Bertrand, 1993; Clark, 2000; Van den Berg, 1999). Children's well being and development suffer when they have poor quality care and even an advantaged family background can't protect them (Doherty, 1999).

Early care has a long lasting impact on ability to learn and capacity to regulate emotions. The human brain has a remarkable capacity to change, but there are critical periods of learning in early childhood, as well as times when negative experience or absence of stimulation are more likely to have negative effects (Cyander & Mustard, 1997; Hertzman & Mustard, 1997; Shore, 1997). "Early experiences can improve intellectual flexibility. They can help make children physically strong and emotionally resilient, or they can contribute to a negative spiral of risk and vulnerability" (Daniel Keating, Chair of Human Development Program of the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research, p. 12 , in *Our promise to children,* 1997). The individual's health, well-being, competence and coping ability throughout life are influenced by early experience (Mustard & McCain, 1999). "While many regard child care as a social welfare program, rather than a health promotion program, child care has significant implications for children's health" (Pimento & Kernested, 2000). Child care plays an important part in healthy child development.

Children's rights. Having ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children, Canada, and the province of Alberta, presumably have an interest and responsibility in protecting the rights of children.

> We live with the irony that, while Canada's children are our most precious resource, they are also our most vulnerable citizens. It is time…that Canadians turn their attention to developing a plan of action that will assure each of our children security, optimal development, and full participation in our nation's life (Carol Shields, Pulitzer Prize winning author, quoted on back cover of *Our Promise to Children,* 1997).

The Council of Europe, in examining the UN Convention on the Rights of Children determined that the quality and quantity of child care services is a crucial issue in the protection of children's rights (Penn, 1999). Provision of high quality care is a means of protecting the rights of children. The UN convention on the rights of children aspires to rights such as the right to live in "an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding" and proposes that those responsible for children in an official capacity must ensure that " the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration" (Article 3, quoted in Penn, 1999, p. 1).

Family support. Access to reliable child care is essential for families who wish to participate in the paid work force, training or education (Friendly, 1997). The quality of child care plays a role in reducing or increasing parent stress load. When parents feel their children's needs are being met in the child care setting, stress is reduced and parents' ability to deal with family responsibilities is improved (Doherty, 2000).

Women in the workforce. Women contribute to Canada's economy an estimated $25.5 million per year in federal and provincial taxes (Vanier Institute for Families. 2000). In 1999, women accounted for 46% of participants in the paid workforce (Statistics Canada, 2000, Table 5.1). Economists from Statistics Canada project that labour force participation of women aged 15-44 will rise from the current rate of approximately 71% to about 80% by 2011 (Beach et al., 1998). Alberta has the highest proportion of women who contribute more than 50% of the family income. In 1995, in 19% of Alberta families, women contributed 50% or more of the income, and in another 17.2% of families, women contributed between 40-49% of the income (Vanier Institute for Families, 2000).

Women want or need to work. Working women reduce the incidence of family poverty and reliance on social assistance. In 1997 the incidence of family poverty among dual earner families was 5%. However, if women's incomes were deducted from the incomes of dual earner families, 18% of dual earner families would fall below the Low Income Cutoff level (Statistics Canada, 2000, p. 146). By continuing to work while children are young, women can avoid long term leave from the workforce, which erode job skills and reductions in future earning power and benefits (Cleveland & Krashinsky, 1998). Many women enjoy their work, want to make use of their education and skills in a paid capacity and appreciate the social milieu of the work-site. Child care is a crucial support for working mothers.

Economic benefits of investing in children. "The quality and availability of child care are very much matters of public interest. High quality child care benefits Canada's present and future citizens, while poor quality care will have serious negative consequences for Canada's economic and social well-being" (Beach et al., 1998, p. 1). Quality child care is a factor in the upbringing of our future workforce as well as a support to our current work force. As stated by Cleveland and Krashinsky:

> Canada depends for its economic well being on its ability to function well socially and economically. Its competitiveness rests above all on the talents and efficiency of its work force (1998, p. 77).

The Perry Preschool Project in the U.S demonstrated the long-term benefits of early intervention for children "at risk", as well as the overall economic and societal benefits of investing in early intervention. Children who participated in this program completed more schooling, used less drugs, were less likely to engage in criminal activity, were more likely to be employed, less likely to be on welfare, and had fewer mental problems than the control group. It is estimated that for every dollar spent on this program, $7 were saved over the next 20 years (in *Our Promise to Children,* 1997). A Canadian study on the economic impact of investing in quality child care found that for every dollar spent on child care there is a $2 economic benefit (Cleveland & Krashinsky,1998). In summary, there are many important reasons why Canadians should be concerned about the quality of care provided to our children.

Models of Accreditation

The child care accreditation system being introduced in Alberta is based on two well-established and researched accreditation systems: the National Association for the

Education of Young Children in the USA, and the National Child Care Accreditation Council in Australia. The experience of Child and Family Resource Association, a group of daycare centres that pioneered their own system of accreditation in Edmonton, has also influenced the development of the Alberta accreditation system. A description of these systems follows.

National Association for the Education of Young Children

The NAEYC is the largest, most well known accreditation system in the United States. It began in 1985, serving both part-day and full day programs serving children from birth to school age, as well as school-age care. Subsequent to the development of this system, many other child care accreditation systems developed in the USA, serving many specific interests, such as family day homes, Christian programs, for-profit centres, and so on.

The accreditation program is managed through a branch of the NAEYC, the National Academy of Early Childhood Programs. Accreditation is funded for the most part through fees charged to programs that seek accreditation, but it is also supported through funding from the governing board of the NAEYC. The original accreditation criteria were based on research, input from the early childhood field and field-testing. A revision of criteria, completed in 1998, again gathered input from the field, especially from those who had participated in the accreditation process. In 1999, a comprehensive, systematic review of the whole accreditation system was undertaken by the National Commission on Accreditation Reinvention, which is "thinking futuristically and strategically about opportunities available to deepen and extend the nation's efforts on behalf of quality child care" (Goffin, 2001b, p. 53).

The current system in the NAEYC involves a three-step process of self-study, validation and the accreditation decision. For self-study, materials provided include a classroom observation checklist, and questionnaires for the administrator and staff and parents to assess the program's ability to meet accreditation criteria. A program description is submitted to the Academy, with information gathered in the self-study. To validate this information, an on-site visit is made by two trained validators, who verify the submitted material through observation and review. Validators are volunteers, who have early childhood experience and a college degree in early childhood education, and have attended training sessions and a supervised validation visit. The accreditation decision is based on the professional judgment of a three-person commission, made up of early childhood professionals. Substantial, but not 100% compliance to criteria is required: the commission determines if the compliance to criteria fall within an acceptable range. If the decision is made not to grant accreditation status, the program is deferred, meaning the program can make required changes and reapply, or it may appeal the decision. Accreditation status is granted for three years, with a requirement of an annual report. Any major changes in facility or personnel must be included in the report. Re-accreditation involves going through all three steps again.

The ten recommendations for re-design of this system have not yet been approved but include revision of the criteria, more stringent requirements for standards compliance, change to a six step process, as well as improved infrastructure with NAEYC to support operations of the Academy. The new system intends to focus on continual improvement as a feature of the accreditation process (Goffin, 2003). It is hoped that the revision will make the system more credible, accountable and reliable, and more able to deal with a high volume of applicants. As well, it aims to be more supportive of equity and diversity, and more inclusive of family, staff and community involvement. Affiliation with The National Association of Family Child Care (family day home accreditation) and the National School-Age Alliance (school-age program accreditation) is being considered (Goffin, 2001a). The new system will be completed in 2005. (Further information is available at www.naeyc.org).

Child Care Accreditation in Australia

"Australia is the first country in the world to develop national child care quality improvement and assurance systems that are initiated, funded and supported by Government" (Taylor, 2002, p. 1). The National Child Care Accreditation Council in Australia was established in 1993, to administer the quality improvement system. The Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QIAS) for long day cares (centres providing care to children ages 0-5) was implemented in 1994, and the Family Day Care Quality Assurance (FDCQA) in 2001. The Outside School Hours Care Quality Assurance (OSHCQA) has been developed over the past two years, and was implemented in July 2003. Both the QIAS and the FDCQA involve five steps, with the basis being self-assessment and validation by peer review. The original QIAS was modeled from NAEYC system in the USA, and involved 52 Principles of quality care. A review of the system in 1998 included input from the field and a psychometric analysis by the Australian Council for Education Research (ACER) which identified that the 10 comprehensive factors, with 35 Principles, that form the structure of the revised QIAS. The FDCQA has 6 Quality Elements with 32 underlying Principles, which were developed from research, input from the field and also were analyzed by ACER. The FDCQA system was implemented in July

2001, and accredits family day care "schemes", that is an agency responsible for management and supervision of family day homes. The schemes are responsible for ensuring that those under their supervision participate in accreditation and meet the quality standards (Taylor, 2003).

A unique feature of this system is the direct link of funding to accreditation. Low and middle-income Australian families are eligible for a Child Care Benefit (child care fee subsidy). Only those child care programs that participate in the quality improvement systems are eligible to offer the Child Care Benefit. Accredited family day care schemes are eligible for operational assistance funding, as well as eligibility to offer the Child Care Benefit. The steps to accreditation are: registration, completion of the self-study and continual improvement process and a validation visit from a selected/trained peer validator. This is followed by a moderation visit, which includes a review of the self-study and validation report and the formation of a "Continuing Improvement Guide". Recommendation of accreditation requires a satisfactory rating on the Composite Quality Profile. The period between accreditation reviews is 2.5 years.

The Australian government funds the infrastructure to support this system, which is implemented through the NCAC. Supporting strategies include publications, videos for the use of the centres, brochures for parents, and a quarterly newsletter, telephone and email support, and an informative web site. (Further information is available at www.ncac.gov.au/).

Bringing it Home to Alberta

The Child and Family Resource Association (CAFRA) is an organization in the Edmonton area whose purpose is to promote the provision of quality child care.

Activities of this organization include monthly meetings for the member day care directors, an accreditation system and fundraising to support the provision of their activities. The organization is open to day care centres within the Edmonton region that wish to meet recognized standards of quality. The accreditation system, which started in 1997, has two components: an audit of the centre's staffing and policies and an on-site observation. The staffing component focuses on the importance of having staff trained in early childhood education. To meet the staffing criteria of the audit component, the centre must have 50% or more staff with at least a two year Early Childhood Diploma, 25% with a one year Early Childhood Certificate, and the remainder must have a Level One Alberta Daycare Qualification Certificate and be enrolled in public college Early Childhood courses. The organizational climate is examined in the policy component which requires policies that are supportive to families, outline appropriate child guidance and provide clear written policies for staff, plus a focus on quality improvement. The *Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale-Revised,* ECERS-R (Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 1998) and the *Infant and Toddler Environmental Rating Scale,* ITERS (Harms, Cryer, & Clifford, 1990) are the assessment tools for the on-site observation, which is carried out by two reviewers. An overall average score of 5 or better on the ECERS-R or ITERS is required to become accredited. A fee to member organizations covers the cost of accreditation, supplemented by fundraising activities organized by CAFRA.

In the early years of the organization, the reviewers were volunteers, typically day care directors from member centres, who had received training in the use of ECERS-R or ITERS. Two problems arose with this arrangement. The first and foremost issue was recruiting volunteers to carry out the on-site visit. As directors faced problems within their own centres with recruiting and retaining staff and struggling to make financial ends meet, it was very difficult to take time away from one's own centre. The second issue was with having peer reviewers who were friends and colleagues, trying to carry out an objective assessment. With only 30 member centres, this was a difficult issue. The situation was resolved by hiring one person, with early childhood background and ECERS-R training and experience, to carry out all on-site assessments, and the audit. It was felt that it was still important for two people to carry out the on-site review, to ensure inter-rater reliability. Since the organization could not afford to hire a second person, the other reviewer was still a peer volunteer. The pool of people trained and willing to volunteer was quite small, so even with this arrangement, it was difficult to get all 30 accreditation visits done within the one-year accreditation period. As a result, the organization decided to have a three-year accreditation period.

On-site visits were last conducted in 2001, pending the development of an Alberta accreditation program. The organization discontinued its own accreditation program when the new system came into place. It was a very time consuming endeavour for volunteer members of the CAFRA executive to organize, and facilitate accreditation. In speaking with Vivian Turner, the past chairperson of CAFRA, it appears that directors are feeling very stressed in trying to deliver high quality programs on limited budgets. Two accredited programs closed within the 2003 year, due to lack of financial resources. Another two discontinued membership due to lack of trained staff, needed to meet CAFRA accreditation criteria (Vivian Turner, CAFRA chairperson, personal communication, August 26, 2003).

Advantages of Accreditation

Based on results of previous models (see Bredekamp & Glowacki, 1996; Bryce & Johnson, 1995; Ethiel, 1997; Whitebrook, Sakai, & Howes, 1997; Zellmann & Johansen, 1998) accreditation helps establish and make visible quality child care standards, to the child care community, parents, government and other funders. Provision of high quality services is linked to beneficial outcomes for children, parents and society. Accountability is built-in through establishment of standards and measures of the child care process. Child care service providers who choose to participate in accreditation demonstrate responsibility and commitment to a quality improvement process. Accreditation contributes to the professionalization of the early childhood field, through establishing of publicly recognized standards. Designation of accreditation status influences market forces, in that it influences parents' decisions in selection of service: " It will do much to re-inject more traditional market forces of supply and demand into the day care equation by helping parents to identify the low-quality providers" (Cleland, 2002, p. 19).

Thus, the ultimate goal of accreditation is to improve quality of care and the availability of quality care for young children. Research conducted on the NAEYC and QIAS systems have shown that accreditation does positively impact program quality in various ways, including improved program provision, program marketing, and parent knowledge about their child's program.

Child care staff plays a key role in the provision of quality care, because they directly determine the daily experience of the children in their care. Involvement in the accreditation process improves staff communication, morale, self-esteem and professional knowledge (Bryce & Johnson, 1995). Staff develop a more favourable attitude about their program and feel a sense of ownership and prestige in the achievement of accreditation status (Ethiel, 1997). There is a decrease in staff turnover in accredited centres, enhanced job satisfaction, plus improved management and communications (Bryce & Johnson, 1995). The accreditation process provides a structured, systematic means of examining the program and designing improvements. Participation in this process results in improvement in care giving, teacher sensitivity, time spent in reciprocal interaction of teachers and children, more child controlled activities and children engaging in more complex play with peers (Ethiel, 1997). The external accountability involved in accreditation helps improve not only the public image of the program, but also the image of the early childhood profession (Mayfield, 2001).

The National Center for Child Care Work Force found NAEYC accredited programs six times more likely to provide quality care than non-accredited programs (Bredekamp, 1999). The Cost, Quality and Child Outcomes Study (Helburn, 1995) demonstrated that some NAEYC accredited programs provided only an adequate level of quality care, as opposed to a high level of quality care. However, the performance overall of accredited programs was better than non-accredited programs (Cryer & Phillipsen, 1997).

As parents became more aware of the NAEYC accreditation system, the number of parent inquiries about accreditation status increased (Whitebrook et al., 1997). Parental input increases and knowledge about the program increases as a result of parent participation in the accreditation process. Parents feel more informed about events and reasons for activities in the child care programs (Bryce, 1996; Zellmann & Johansen, 1998). As noted by the Chief Executive Officer of the Australian National Accreditation

Council, “there is still a huge gap between many practitioners and parents, but it is important to develop a constructive partnership between parents and professionals” (Bryce, 1996, p. 36). Because accreditation requires parental input through surveys and involvement on the accreditation team within each program, it provides a means of promoting constructive partnership.

Issues that Arise in the Context of Accreditation

Accreditation occurs within the context of the child care programs, the communities that the programs serve, within a given set of government regulations regarding child care and within the political and economic climate of that community. There are many factors that can influence the impact and effectiveness of accreditation upon child care.

One issue is the organizational climate of the child care program. “In our experience, the administrator's knowledge and skill is the most important predictor of success in a program becoming accredited” (Bredekamp, 1999, p. 60). The organizational climate, the underlying scripts about “the way we do things here” and the leadership role of the director are crucial factors in building a climate of reflective practice and desire for program improvement (Carter,1998; Hatherly, 1999).

Another major issue is staff turnover, which can affect both the accreditation process and the validity of accreditation status. In her survey of why some programs stall in the NAEYC accreditation process, Talley (1997) noted that staff turnover and change in program director during self-study was a significant factor in non-completion.

Next, participation rate is a key issue. In the NAEYC system, where there are no direct financial supports to accreditation, there is a high dropout rate during self-study

(Whitebrook et al., 1997). In recent years, there has been a growth in the number of programs in the U.S.A. seeking NAEYC accreditation: this can be attributed to funding connections. For example, 17 states offer from 5 to 20% higher parent fee subsidies, for children attending accredited child care programs (National Academy of Early Childhood Programs, 2000). Higher center reimbursement rates are paid by 34 states to NAEYC accredited programs (see www.naeyc.org/childrens-champions/statepolicies.asp). In the Australian system, where there is a direct financial benefit to participation in the accreditation system, there is almost a 100% participation rate, and most programs are accredited. For example, in Nov. 2001, only 3% of day care centres were not accredited (Taylor, 2002).

Also of importance is that contextual variables work in synergy. A key finding of Whitebrook, Sakai and Howes study (1997) was that accreditation status alone does not predict higher quality care. A combination of nonprofit status, higher wages for staff, and retention of skilled teachers, in combination with accreditation did predict high quality.

Finally, there is no infrastructure to support child care accreditation. "One of the most striking characteristics of the current program for young children outside the home is the absence of a comprehensive infrastructure or support system to stand behind the delivery of services to the child and family" (Gallagher & Clifford, 2000). Alberta Children's Services Department provides licensing regulations and funding, and child care fee subsidies for licensed child care programs. However, there is no comprehensive infrastructure to support affordable, accessible care and education for all young children. The development of an accreditation system will serve as a means of recognizing quality care, but it cannot fill the gap of missing infrastructure. Comprehensive government policy and appropriate funding is required to establish a supportive infrastructure.

Disadvantages of Accreditation

The accreditation process itself creates consequences that could have a negative impact on child care programs.

Time. Participation in the accreditation process requires both time and effort of the program director, staff and parents (Bryce & Johnson, 1995; Talley, 1997). The development, monitoring and revision of accreditation system and criteria are also processes that take time. For example, the "reinvention" of NAEYC began in November 1999 and will not be complete until 2005. Development and revision requires the time for evaluative research, consultation with experts and the early childhood community, and field-testing.

Time between accreditation and re-accreditation is another issue. The NAEYC accreditation period is three years, with requirement of annual report. Credibility of the system was strained by lack of staffing to follow up on annual reports: to ensure they were submitted, to review them, to note concerns and to make validation spot-checks. This has recently been addressed through adding a staff department to track reports (Pat Mucci, NAEYC, personal communication, August 1, 2003). The revision of NAEYC is considering extending the accreditation period to five years, still requiring on annual report, and adding random site visits during the accreditation period (NAEYC, 2003). The Australian system has a 2.5 year period between accreditation visits. In the initial phase of QIAS, accreditation periods were 1, 2 or 3 years, dependent on how well the program had met the standards and criteria of accreditation.

Cost. Costs associated with accreditation are a concern. For the accreditation body, there are costs of management, support staff, regional management and early childhood consultants, the accreditation reporting system, publications, public relations materials, legal advice and support, plus ongoing research and consultation. To the child care program there is a cost of director and staff time, distribution of surveys, provision of child care and meals after hours to secure parent involvement, and the cost of training and resources for program improvement (Bryce & Johnson, 1995). In the NAEYC system, there is a cost to the program based on the number of children enrolled, for accreditation application and validation. Other fees are charged for cancellation of a validation visit, a verification visit, and the annual report. These fees are intended to cover the costs of the accreditation body.

There are also issues around the cost of validation. Validators are typically peer reviewers, meaning they need release time from their own programs for training and for the actual validation visits. As well, there are the costs of travel and accommodations if attending training or conducting the visit outside their own place of residence. Both the NAEYC and NCAC systems use peer validators. The NAEYC are field-testing the use of paid validators, as a means to allow for more validation visits, and potentially more reliable on-site observation and verification. Peer validators experience difficulty in leaving their own programs, which take priority over voluntary participation. In Alberta, CAFRA experienced difficulty recruiting peer validators, due to this issue. Rescheduling of validation visits presents another cost. Even compensated validators are experiencing difficulty in scheduling validation visits (Pat Mucci, NAEYC, personal communication, August 1, 2003).

Another issue is the cost of child care for families. "Many young families today can not afford the high cost of good child care. They tend to choose cheaper options which studies indicate are poorer quality" (Child Care Research and Resource Unit, 1998, p. 2). Provision of high quality care is costly. If accredited programs have to raise fees to an unreasonable level to cover costs of improved services, families may simply opt for unlicensed, unregulated care because of affordability.

Professional Demands. Accreditation creates a new level of demand for early childhood professionals. Training, support and professional associations can help alleviate stress. However, there may be a resistance to training, especially amongst family day home providers (Goodfellow, 2002).

Liability. By publicly declaring that a child care program meets high standards, a level of expectation for quality services is created. Parents may seek damages against the program and the accrediting body, should circumstances indicate that standards have been breached. The accreditation body may also be in a position of having to defend accreditation decisions in court, because a program denied accreditation status may lose its reputation and funding (Morgan, 1996).

Addressing the Alberta Context

In order to develop and implement an effective accreditation system for Alberta, the contextual issues and demands of the accreditation process need to be addressed. The end goal of accreditation is to provide young children with an optimal child care experience. It is a tool to be used by child care programs to identify what they do well, and what aspects of their program need improvement. Through use of this tool, they are able to demonstrate their commitment to providing a quality program for children. For parents and the public, accreditation offers a means of identifying programs that provide quality care, and it affords an assurance that the program is providing a nurturing atmosphere and appropriate learning opportunities for children. However, if only a small number of programs become accredited, the benefits of accreditation will not be widely recognized and will not have meaning to the public. To attract full participation of child care programs, this research is designed to discover what meaningful incentives and a supportive infrastructure could be provided to child care directors/owners to motivate them to participate in the accreditation process.

CHAPTER 4: METHOD

Overall Strategy, Assumptions and Rationale for Qualitative Design

In *Cultural Worlds of Early Childhood* (1998), Singer urges psychologists to become aware of the views of childhood implicit in their theorizing and:

> to recognize that quality child care issues are not reducible to scientific enquiry alone, since they are framed within cultural values that can best be addressed within more local context-bound research, in which the researchers own position is made explicit (p. 3).

The use of qualitative enquiry into child care director's perspectives of barriers and supports to accreditation in Alberta was this researcher's attempt to explore local context-bound issues. In the case of this research, the concept of accreditation relies heavily upon developmental theory. It is based in the belief that high standards of child care practice help maximize the child's opportunity to develop within a nurturing, educational environment.

A framework analysis design (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994) was chosen, to explore how child care directors/owners are engaging in, and responding to the introduction of accreditation of child care programs. Although previous research has been carried out on child care accreditation, existing research on facilitation of accreditation is limited. Since accreditation is just in the process of being introduced in Alberta, this study has the potential to capture the reactions to this phenomenon and generate information regarding what supports child care programs need in order to succeed in the accreditation process. Qualitative research is suited to the exploration of areas where not much is known about a phenomenon (Patton, 2002). Other reasons for choosing a qualitative approach, outlined by Creswell (1998) include audience reception and researcher role as an active learner. I believe the primary audience for the study is the early childhood community in Alberta. Having been a part of that community for many years, I believe that they will find this qualitative approach meaningful. In my role as a researcher I wanted to be "an *active learner* who can tell the story from the participant's view rather than an *expert* who passes judgement on the participants" (Creswell, 1998. p. 18). A qualitative approach seemed ideal for the topic and approach I wished to undertake.

There are five basic assumptions that guide qualitative research. They are: (a) ontological, meaning that reality is viewed as having many perspectives, which can be explored through discussion with participants in the study; (b) epistemological, meaning that the researcher becomes involved as a participant during the course of the study; (c) axiological, meaning that the researcher acknowledges the biases and values brought to the research; (d) rhetorical, meaning the researcher brings a personal voice and qualitative terminology to the written presentation of the study; and (e) methodological, meaning the research is context-based and examines details and generates questions before generalizations are considered (Creswell, 1998). Using a qualitative design facilitated exploration of the reality faced by child care directors/owners in preparing for accreditation.

Type of Design

Framework analysis design (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994) was chosen as an approach that is aligned to applied research, where the aim of the research is to obtain specific information needed to make recommendations about a particular policy or action; usually this information needs to be made available within a short timescale. This method of analysis is inductive but it allows for *a prior* determination of categories or themes, meaning the themes are established in the beginning, but they may be changed and modified (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). The themes originally proposed in this research are the themes imbedded in the research questions (Appendix A). A qualitative approach was chosen to facilitate the exploration of a new phenomenon, (i.e. child care accreditation in Alberta) within the context of its development.

Participants

Research was conducted with urban daycare centres in the province of Alberta. Day homes and rural child care programs were not included in the study. Child care centre directors/owners were chosen as the interviewees, because of their key role in initiating changes necessary for program improvements leading to accreditation. According to Bredekamp (1999), the knowledge and skill of the leader within the child care centre is the most important predictor of success in a program becoming accredited. The organizational climate and the leadership role are crucial factors in building a climate of reflective practice and desire for program improvement (Carter, 1998; Hatherly, 1999).

Nominated sampling (Morse & Richards, 2002) was used for initial interviews. Key informants were initially identified and selected through The Alberta Child Care Network, a group that includes representatives of various child care organizations, including nonprofit and for-profit centres, throughout Alberta. I met with this group in June 2004, to outline my research project and ask them to identify daycare directors/owners in urban areas who would likely be interested and willing participants. Interviewees were also invited to identify other persons they viewed as key informants. (See Appendix B).

Purposeful selection of two types of centre directors/owners was made, to fully understand their approach to accreditation. I selected centre directors/owners who identified themselves as likely to be prepared and ready for the accreditation process before it was even in place, and others who were informed about accreditation and wanted to engage in the process, but were not ready to do so. Maximum variation, a type of purposeful sampling that cuts across variety within the sample to capture core experience (Patton, 2002) was also utilized. Factors considered in variation of this study were auspice, and size of centre. I tried to ensure that both commercial operators and nonprofit centres were represented in this research, to capture the voice of both types of centres within this province. I also purposely sought out both large and small centres to explore possible differences and shared dimensions of experience.

Depending on the participant's responses, the emerging data and the clarification of meaning toward a saturation point, interviews were continued until further collection of data no longer yielded new or relevant information. The total number of interviews conducted was dependent on the point of saturation of categories of information.

Sixteen interviews were conducted in the greater Edmonton area, Calgary and Lethbridge. Interviewees included Executive Directors, Program Directors, and Owner Directors. Executive Directors are those who directors who direct a child care program as well as other programs within a nonprofit centre. Program Directors are on-site directors at a program that may be either profit or nonprofit. The Owner Directors interviewed had on-site program directors, but were directly involved in the day-to-day programming, staffing and leadership of their centres. Experience of the Executive Directors, Program Directors, and Owner Directors, in the child care field, ranged from 2 to 30 years. Two of the interviewees had no early childhood education, but did hold degrees in other disciplines. The study included 10 nonprofit centres and 6 commercial centres. Centre size ranged from 29 to 80 licensed, utilized spaces. Only two of the centres in the study had all Level 3 (two year early childhood diploma or equivalent) staff. Four of the centres interviewed had only a minimal number of trained staff, as mandated in Alberta Daycare Regulations. Seven of those interviewed indicated that they anticipated no barriers to becoming accredited.

Data Collection

Interviews were on average, an hour in length. The actual range was half an hour to three hours. They were conducted at a time and place convenient to the interviewee. The interview began with an open-ended question: "I am interested in hearing your story about the complexities of the environment in which accreditation is taking place. Tell me about your response to the Alberta accreditation program". Directors were encouraged to tell their stories about the complexities of the environment in which accreditation is to take place. More specific questions about supports and barriers, ways of initiating changes needed to become accredited and motivation factors were then directed to participants. (See Appendix A) This type of semi-structured interview provided the organization of pre-planned questions, but the scope for detailed, complex responses from participants (Morse, 2001). According to Morse (2001), it is important to explore how participants create and respond to experience. In my research, this meant exploring the response to accreditation.

Data Analysis

Interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. The words of the participants about the accreditation process are used for analysis using a constant comparative procedure within framework analysis. Key stages of analysis within a thematic framework are: transcription of data/familiarization; identifying a thematic framework; indexing, charting and mapping/interpretation (Lacey & Luff, 2001). A thematic framework, or index is applied systematically to the text, and gives rise to the ability to see patterns and ranges within topics and themes. Charting of themes in each key subject area and mapping of the key dimensions identified provides a means of interpreting the data (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). In my research, this analysis examined the response of child care directors/owners to the implementation of the child care accreditation system in Alberta. The words of the participants were used to develop themes and categories for analysis. The research questions formed the initial index of themes within interview responses. Themes that arose as analysis proceeded were incorporated into the index, which was then used as the basis for charting and mapping of responses (Appendix C: Main Index).

Data were analyzed and then it was decided what data needed to be collected next. Thus sampling was dependent on the participant's responses, the emerging data and the clarification of meaning toward a saturation point, where further collection of data no longer yields new or relevant information. The use of child care director's responses of to the semi-structured interview, helped ground the results in their perspective of the accreditation process.

Role of the Researcher

My interest in pursuing research in this area arises from 15 years of experience working in the child care field. Both as a child care worker and a child care director, I experienced a high level of frustration over two issues. The first frustration arose from lack of public recognition of what constitutes quality care. I once overheard one parent telling another that she never realized what a tremendous difference there could be in programs, until she moved her child from another centre to ours. She delightedly described the differences in caring, education and food service that she had discovered within our program. Parents base selection of child care on a wide range of variables including their own background and education, their economic status, cultural assumptions and practical logistics, such as location and cost (Kontos, Howes, Shinn, & Galinsky, 1995; Young, 1996). Research indicates that they do not have sufficient information to enable them to identify indicators of quality care (Golberg, 1999).

The second issue that I found extremely frustrating was the lack of public recognition of child care workers as professionals, deserving of worthy wages. Common economic explanations for the reasons that wages are so low arise from misunderstanding of the skilled nature of working and caring in an early childhood setting (Nelson, 2001). These two issues: involving lack of recognition of the worth and value of quality child care, led to my active involvement in a number of organizations that advocated for accessible, affordable, quality child care. Two of the organizations I was involved with advocated accreditation of child care, as a means for helping parents identify quality care and a channel for government or other funders to direct funding to quality programs. I was actively involved in the implementation of a local accreditation system in

Edmonton and research endeavours to support the implementation of accreditation at a provincial level. More recently, I researched issues related to the consequences of implementation of accreditation in Alberta, in the form of a literature review for "The Partners": a Partnership of the Canadian Child Care Federation and the Alberta Child Care Network, which helped design the Alberta accreditation program.

While I can see the potential advantages of an accreditation system for Alberta, I am also very concerned that the context for its implementation is very complex. An interest in examining these multiple factors, that may influence accreditation, led to this study. While exploring the response of directors/owners to accreditation, I attempted to bracket my own knowledge and interest, by focusing the perceptions expressed by interviewees and placing my own responding thoughts and beliefs in memos (Morse & Richards, 2002; Creswell, 1998).

Rigor

Rigor while conducting the research project was ensured by: using appropriate sampling techniques, appropriate pacing of the project, coding reliably and keeping memos and a project history (Morse & Richards, 2002). The sampling techniques I have outlined were an attempt to maximize variation of the sample, ensuring that I had centres who have many existing supports for becoming accredited (the ones who are ready) and others who face many barriers to accreditation (the ones who want to become accredited but are not at all ready). I invested the full time necessary for appropriate pacing of data, to ensure full collection of rich and thick data, appropriate analysis and movement from synthesis toward an interpretation of data. In my analysis of semi-structured interviews, coding remained malleable, in order to track changes in interview content and the details necessary to gain understanding of the process that was being examined (Morse & Richards, 2002). To ensure rigor, coding decisions were tracked, data stored with categories recorded, and verified with further interviews until no new data was necessary.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical guidelines of the University of Alberta were adhered to, as well as the specific regulations of the Faculty of Education, Department of Educational Psychology. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. Participation was voluntary and the participants were informed that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time. (See Appendix B: Information Letter and Consent Form). Information that was obtained that might identify individuals was locked in my home office and shall not be shared without the consent of the individual. Participants were given an alias and descriptors used sparingly to protect individual identity. Electronic data is stored on a password-protected computer. Data will be retained for a five year period, after which time it will be destroyed by shredding of paper and destruction of electronic data.

Participants in the study were provided an opportunity to share their personal situation and opinion with an interested party, and contribute to knowledge and understanding of the child care situation in Alberta. By being involved in this study participants shared their thoughts about child care accreditation and their knowledge about their own centre's strengths and limitations. They were given the opportunity for individual reflection through discussion with the investigator.

Care was taken to create a safe environment for the interview and the opportunity to debrief was offered. Participants may have been inconvenienced by the commitment of time for the interview. To minimize this, interviews were held at a time and location that accommodated their schedules. Through reviewing the benefits of participation, I hoped that participants experienced this time commitment as an opportunity rather than an inconvenience.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

Introduction

Since accreditation is just in the process of being introduced to Alberta, this study sought to capture the reactions to this phenomenon and generate ideas regarding the needs of child care programs to succeed in the accreditation process. Interviews were conducted with urban daycare directors/owners and a thematic framework analysis was applied to the words of the participants. This chapter reviews the results of the data analysis, uniqueness of findings, and the limitations of this study.

Results of the Framework Analysis

This section describes the results of the framework analysis. It begins by describing the indexed themes that were used for the original sorting of interview data (See Appendix C: Data Analysis Framework; Main Index). It then details the key dimensions of accreditation in terms of supports and barriers, motivation, and consequences (See Appendix C: Data Analysis Framework; Charting). Also included are other topics arising from synthesis of the indexed themes: degree of readiness for accreditation; background issues influencing accreditation; child care director's perceptions of the new standards; and what strategies they felt would be useful for engaging the accreditation process.

Indexed Themes

Daycare directors/owners in urban daycare centres in Alberta were interviewed in order to explore what they perceived as the barriers and supports to their centre's ability to enter the accreditation program. Staff trained in early childhood education was identified as the most important support, and the area that would most influence readiness to become accredited. Conversely, lack of trained staff was described as the greatest barrier. This was the main theme that emerged within every interview. Participants also described complexities in the child care field that would influence their ability to participate, their perceptions of the new accreditation system, what strategies they would undertake in entering the accreditation process, what motivated them to participate or not, and what they saw as the consequences of the new system. The impact of accreditation on parents and staff arose as major themes within these interviews. All of the directors/owners interviewed indicated that they wanted to pursue accreditation. Some were ready and into the required self-study process, while others were not ready to apply for self-study as they faced various challenges.

Supports and Barriers to Accreditation

Four key areas were identified as either a support or barrier to accreditation: staff, leadership, connections, and centre attributes. A fifth theme that arose during analysis was centre synergy: the way all these four areas work together shapes the quality of the centre. The four areas identified were either cited as centre strengths that would support the ability of the centre to become accredited or barriers that would inhibit the ability to become accredited.

Staff

The primary element that was identified as both a support and a barrier to accreditation was staff trained in early childhood education. This theme was central to all interviews. In combination with early childhood training, other staff qualities that were cited as important to the strength of the centre were the capability of the staff to fit within the organizational culture of the centre, having been employed within the centre for a length of time, being able to work together as a team, and a sense of commitment to early childhood as their career of choice. In the words of an interviewee, "It's not just because the staff are Level 3's, it is the particular staff. I've got a really strong level 3 heading up the team that is really organized, knowledgeable, up on current research, and really up on things." Barriers to attracting and retaining qualified staff included low staff wages, poor working conditions and staff turnover. This is how one interviewee described the situation:

> There is very old research and very new research and they all say the same thing, that the greatest predictor of quality child care is highly trained staff. We already know all this stuff; this is not new. And what keeps child care in Alberta from being high quality is the fact that we don't have a sufficient supply of highly trained staff and we don't have that because there is not enough money in the field to pay them to go to school. So they don't go to school. So we have fewer quality centres as we have fewer highly trained staff, and in the meantime, any money that is coming into this province is going into taking some of the highest paid, and best qualified staff out of the child care field and putting them into the monitoring field.

The words of this participant reflect another concern within the field: that highly trained early childhood staff are being attracted away from daycares and into early intervention, consulting, monitoring and other programs that are recipients of government funding because of better pay and working conditions provided. Another area of concern was that many people who work in daycare simply want a job; child care is not their chosen career, and as a result there is a high turnover. As stated by one interviewee:

> Staff is constantly changing because they just come here for an easy job. The job is stressful, it isn't easy, and so they leave. They are always changing and it is hard on the only one that stays. It is so hard on the children and it is hard for the parents. It would be good if you could have the same kids and the same staff in the daycare for a few years, so you could build cooperation and understanding.

Leadership

Another key area of consideration to the process of becoming accredited that emerged was the ability and commitment of the centre leader and the overall organizational culture. The centre leader may be the Executive Director, the Program Director, The Owner Director and/or some combination of these, but all participants indicated that someone within the daycare organization (usually the interviewee) would take the lead and guide the centre through the accreditation process. A confident attitude and enthusiastic approach to undertaking new challenges was cited as an aspect of leadership that would facilitate accreditation; whereas a fear of failure was a potential reason not to engage in the accreditation process. A good background understanding of early childhood development was thought to be an asset to understanding the accreditation standards, to supporting the staff in their understanding, and to working together through the process. Where the owner/operator was not directly involved in the management of the centre and/or had little background in early childhood, it was indicated that would be a barrier to becoming accredited.

Organizational culture. The organizational culture of the centre was another aspect tied to leadership that could support or challenge the centre's readiness to meet accreditation standards. An organizational culture that had an established value of continual improvement and offered policies to guide staff and involve parents was seen as paving the way for accreditation to occur. Policy and practice within organizations that valued staff and provided them with opportunities for paid planning time, paid professional development, and input into the centre's operation were detailed as aspects of organizational culture that supported and strengthened centre quality. Good communication was specified as an essential component of positive working relationships. Lack of this type of staff support and positive working relationships was seen as a potential barrier to accreditation. Without staff backing and knowledge of the accreditation aims and process, it would be very difficult to become accredited. These various aspects of leadership and organizational culture work in synergy as described by this interviewee, "I think we have a good philosophy here. We believe strongly in providing the best environment for children. We all enjoy what we do."

Connections

Supports provided within the organization. Centres that were part of a larger organization, with multiple programs and sources of funding identified their organizational situation as providing various means of internal support for children, families and staff and of providing staff with a career ladder. Many of these organizations had a social worker on-site or easily accessible. This service was seen as providing an invaluable strength to the program in terms of connections to the community, and support to children, families and staff. These larger organizations also had a wealth of support staff to undertake duties such as cooking, cleaning, and administrative work, so that the focus of the child care staff was the children and the programming. These types of supports were cited as contributing to the strength of the centre and its ability to become accredited. Some centres however, were isolated programs, with minimal community connections and with minimal written policy. The centre directors in that situation indicated that most of their time is spent working directly with children, leaving no time for making connections or undertaking tasks such as developing policy as required in the accreditation standards.

Connections with community. Having connections with parents, the community and other organizations was another key element of strength that was cited as important to the strength of the daycare centre and its ability to become accredited. On the other hand, difficulty in obtaining parental and/or community cooperation, and being isolated from other centres and services was indicated as a potential barrier to accreditation. Parents can play a key role as indicated by this participant:

> We have a very strong support from our parent board. They are very much behind providing quality care for the children in our community and they are also behind the staff and what they are doing. They think of their board planning as doing what is best for the children and what is best for the staff.

Conversely, many of the interviewees indicated that it was difficult to obtain the support of parents, because after working or going to school all day parents lacked the time, energy and commitment to engage in supporting the daycare centre. Community support, including the support of volunteers, was described as beneficial to accreditation. The community can, however, also pose potential problems to the child care program as illustrated by this interviewee:

> Because we work within specific sites within the community, we depend on the cooperation of these sites in meeting some of the standards. For example, our

> playground is in a very public area, where people go for their smoke breaks. We can't control that.

In other words, without the cooperation of the community, this site may encounter difficulties meeting some of the accreditation standards.

Being connected and involved with the child care community and in particular the development, piloting, and assessor training of the new accreditation agency were recognized as assets to becoming accredited. Connections with other centres through belonging to a child care organization provided directors/owners with opportunities for networking, personal support and sharing of information. Involvement with the accreditation development and training provided an insight into the system, which was valued as giving a jump-start to the centre's accreditation journey. Other centres have had few connections that support them as indicated by this participant:

> I think a huge barrier is isolation. They don't belong to a group of centres; they are just out there on their own. And even if you have the option of participating in a daycare association, it is very hard to take time away from your centre. It is a financial investment for the centre to free up staff to be involved in networking and advocacy. The staff and parents find it hard to see the need for such action. It is much easier to see the little picture of the day-to-day centre operation than to see a bigger child care picture.

Connections with organizations (e.g., Alberta's Promise) or government initiatives (e.g., Early Childhood Development Initiative projects) that provided funding and/or other supports, were cited as crucial to: providing better staff wages; family supports; staff support; and opportunities that facilitated the strength of the organization and the readiness of the daycare to become accredited. These connections often provided easy access or on-site access to a social worker, early childhood consultants, and early intervention services such as assessment, referral and funded support for children with special needs. Good relationships with the local college that provides early childhood courses, with licensing, with local health authorities and with Family Community Support Services were also cited as important supports. However, these supports were completely absent in some of the centres that participated in the study. In the words of this director:

> Children come here from low-income families and often they have terrible things happening in their lives. We don't have the training to support them or any way to help these families. These children are often very hard to manage because they have such difficult behaviour. It is not fair that the level of the daycare should be judged by accreditation when we have these children to deal with. It is beyond our control. They should give more help to these daycares. The government needs to provide supports, like a psychologist to work with the children, someone who would provide resources on programming and equipment and someone just to help with cleaning.

The absence of community connections and supports is clearly a barrier for some centres.

Centre Attributes

Centre attributes that were cited as either a support or a barrier were: (a) the size of the centre, (b) the number of children per room, (c) the physical design of the centre, (d) toys and equipment, and (e) the type of program provided.

(a) *Size.* With regard to size, some (3 of 16) interviewees cited the large size of the centre as an advantage, while others cited small size as an advantage. The advantages specified in a large size facility included spacious playrooms, office space, and kitchen space. The advantages of a small facility were cited as being more home-like and providing the opportunity to know and engage with each child and family.

(b) *Number*. A small number of children per room was cited as a desirable feature.

(c) *Design.* Some (5 of 16) participants mentioned the physical design of the centre as a potential barrier to accreditation as described by this participant:

> There are areas that physically, I can't improve or change in my centres. There would need to be a lot of money put in to change them to meet the full accreditation standard. I don't think it will ever happen. I know why it would be lovely to have a different physical design, but whether that is practical or even possible through permits and such, I don't know.

For other centres, physical design was cited as a strength that would enhance the accreditation bid, particularly if the centre was originally built and designed as a daycare.

(d) *Equipment.* Toys and equipment were also described as adding or taking away from the centre's strength, as expressed by this interviewee:

> It is important to understand the uniqueness of having a veritable treasure chest of equipment and using the pieces out of that treasure chest to enhance areas like speech, language, math, science, and early literacy, to enhance the opportunities for children and to peak their interest.

Some (4 of 16) directors/owners mentioned that they struggled with providing and maintaining equipment, and resorted to using donated toys that were sometimes unsuitable or well worn. A few centres had access to a toy-lending type of program that enhanced the directors/owners' ability to provide new and appropriate toys, which they viewed as adding to program strength.

(e) *Programming.* The curriculum or programming provided by the centre was also part of the accreditation picture. In some centres, the curriculum is considered an essential aspect of the quality of care provided, as referenced by this interviewee:

> We have always considered ourselves to be a program that delivered quality care. We are already using emergent curriculum, we are looking at pieces of Reggio Emilia programming, and the project approach. We provide a program that moves the child forward in preparedness for school, for society and to be a good member of our community. I think those are the things we teach. We teach socialization, empathy, and acceptance. All of that can be done in a really good program that has multicultural aspects and full inclusion for children with disabilities. Children in various programs and backgrounds will all end up walking through the same school door at the same time, and we have to be responsible for teaching them to be a community and to live together, starting from a very young age.

Child care organizations that valued this type of program planning typically provided staff with paid planning time, whereas others provided no planning time. In some centres, planning of the program was a struggle due to lack of planning time and the lack of training or interest of staff, as stated by this participant:

> Some staff just come for a job; they are not interested in this type of quality program planning. They just want to put in the 8 hours and go home. It is hard to work with people like that.

Program planning, facilitated by trained staff, with paid planning time, was cited as a centre attribute that would support the accreditation process, where as lack of program planning would act as a barrier to accreditation.

Synergy

The results of this study indicate that these four areas, staff, leadership, connections, and centre attributes form the major supports and/or barriers to seeking accredited status in the new accreditation system, as identified by daycare directors/ owners. Having trained, competent staff was the area that was cited as most crucial. It is important to note that these things work in conjunction with one another as opposed to being separate entities as indicated by this participant, "When a daycare is running well, it's a group of things, not only the staff, but the management, the program, the food program, and so on." This fifth theme became evident as participants described their centres' strengths and the process they were undertaking in response to accreditation. The trained staff, the commitment of the leader and the centre policies on quality issues, the connections to the community and to funding and the attributes of the centre were not isolated factors: these factors work in synergy and are the underlying key to the ability of the centre to provide a quality child care program.

In the literature review (see section on indicators of quality child care), structural, process and contextual variables were identified as interconnected influences on quality of child care. The center attributes identified by directors/owners in this study are similar to those identified as structural variables. The presence of staff trained in early childhood was noted by directors/owners in this study as the key variable. This highlights the importance of the process variables, through which early childhood staff shape the daily interactions with children. But it was also noted by participants that the role of the leader and the connections of the child care center to community funding and support are critical to the support of both staff and children within the program. These findings indicate that it is the notion of the synergy of the quality child care variables that is most important in supporting or blocking the centre's path to achieving quality standards.

What Motivates Participation in Accreditation?

Interviewees indicated that the three main reasons to undertake the accreditation process and achieve accredited status are: (a) an aspiration to provide quality care, (b) a desire for public recognition of having achieved quality standards, and (c) the lure of the funding tied to accredited status.

Aspiration to provide quality care. The desire to provide quality care was offered by many participants as a reason to participate in accreditation. The words of this interviewee capture ambition:

> Ultimately, I want to be able to provide the highest possible quality program for the children. And I want the staff that work for me to have that same passion, to want to provide that care and to want to push themselves and challenge what they are doing now, to go further and be better and to provide the kids with a program that continues to grow and continues to get better. Hopefully I will be able to pass on that passion.

Desire for public recognition. The recognition provided through achieving accredited status was another aspect of accreditation that the study participants valued. Some public means of having accredited status recognized, that were mentioned by participants were centre advertisements and government websites. The recognition of having achieved standards above and beyond licensing was seen as very desirable as reflected by this interviewee:

> Really it is about recognition of achieving something. At this centre we feel that we excel above minimum licensing but we want to take it further and that is what accreditation is. I want to get involved in accreditation and really feel good about it, and to be able to say we went through this whole process, we were scrutinized, we were gone over with a fine-toothed comb and we came out and we were successful.

Lure of the funding. All interviewees cited the funding attached to accreditation as crucial in motivating centres to participate in the new accreditation scheme. Funding connected with accreditation includes wage enhancement for primary staff, professional development funding, program improvements required that are identified in the self-study process and ongoing program upkeep. There is a pre-accreditation phase, in which partial funding is available to centres who meet certain criteria that is specified through the licensing department. Because there has been no funding of this nature previously, interviewees indicated a real starvation for funding that they felt was finally being recognized. The words of this participant capture this hunger for funding:

> Whatever hoops we have to jump through, we will jump through, because we are all so desperate for enough support that we don't have to raise our fees beyond what our families can afford.

Motivation to become accredited typically involved a combination of aspiration to provide quality care, a desire for public recognition of standards achieved, and a need for the funding tied to accreditation.

Consequences

Participants in the study related a number of actual and potential consequences that were occurring with the implementation of accreditation. The areas they focussed most attention on, and which will be presented first, were consequences for staff and parents. Other areas that were brought to light included: (a) time and cost; (b) auspice; (c) potential for quality improvement; (d) impact on out-of-school care; and (e) further linkages and services envisioned.

Staff. The impact of accreditation on staff was discussed in terms of wages, the ability of accredited centres to attract good staff, staff turnover, positive and negative feelings toward accreditation, increased expectations and an increased sense of professionalism. In terms of the wage enhancement that is provided through pre-accreditation and accreditation funding, all participants indicated staff were pleased to receive even a small amount. There was no consensus on the issue of a centre's ability to attract good staff by attaining accredited status, and thereby offering better staff wages. While most participants (11 of 16) perceived this as an obvious outcome, a few felt that people who enter the field as a job, with a minimal level of training would not be aware of wage enhancements provided in pre-accredited and accredited centres. Competition between centres for trained staff; low wages, the stressful nature of the job (long hours, physically demanding, job insecurity, shift work required), and lack of support staff for cooking and cleaning were all cited as contributing to the high turnover of staff in the field. Some (3 of 16) participants thought that accreditation would create even more competition between centres for trained staff, contributing further to staff turnover and competitiveness versus cooperation between centres. A concern was expressed that accredited status could not be achieved and maintained in a situation of constant staff turnover.

Feelings of staff towards accreditation were reported to range from very excited and enthusiastic to apprehensive and oppositional to change. Nervousness about being judged was noted as existing alongside the feelings of excitement. The process of working through and meeting the standards of accreditation increased expectations and workload for staff. While this was seen positively as an opportunity to reflect on and improve practice, it was also a seen as creating more work and pressure on staff, and placing expectations of putting in unpaid time to attend meetings, workshops and other activities related to achieving accreditation status.

It was indicated by some (5 of 16) directors/owners that releasing staff for Validator and Moderator training and duties was beneficial in helping the staff and the centre be more familiar with accreditation. To other interviewees, releasing their trained staff to be engaged elsewhere, even for short periods of time, was seen as an impossibility, because they has very few trained staff to support their own program.

Most participants (10 of 16) suggested that the notion of setting and achieving quality standards voluntarily was creating an enhanced sense of professionalism in the field, as expressed by this interviewee, "Accreditation does lead to a sense of professionalism for staff: it is as if we have just discovered a tunnel of collective consciousness." It remains to be seen whether the additional pay, increased opportunity for reflective practice and increased sense of enthusiasm and professionalism are outweighed by the additional work and stress created for staff.

Parents. Although no direct question was addressed to participants about parents, the subject was brought up by directors/owners of how parents make child care choices and how accreditation might impact those decisions. Most (10 of 16) indicated that they feel parents want to choose the best quality care for their children, but they lack knowledge of how to recognize quality practice. Participants also noted that parents are strongly impacted by practical factors such as location, cost and availability of space in the centre. Unique family or cultural needs were cited as another aspect of parents' decision-making process. The words of this interviewee capture the views of many (9 of 16) of the participants of this study:

> A lot of parents don't even have the option of quality child care. I mean, they know what's out there, but they just don't have the option. They have a budget and if they can afford $100 on child care, they just have to go with that $100. Maybe they do know its not so highly qualified but they have no choice. They have to suspend their doubt and concern because the alternative is unthinkable: that they would purposely put their child in a centre that was not going to be in the child's best interest. When you don't have any choice in the matter, that's, you know… That's what happens.

Participants were split in their views on how accreditation would impact parents' choice of care arrangements. Of the 16 interviewed, nine saw accreditation as making a real impact that parents would come to recognize and choose child care on the basis of accredited status. As summarized by this interviewee, participants indicated that both government and the child care centres could play a role in the education of parents about the meaning of accreditation.

> The government needs to do some public education for parents, like they did with the blue booklet. They need to revise that booklet to educate parents about accreditation. Each child care centre and agency also has a responsibility to educate parents about accreditation.

However, the remaining 7 participants felt that "accredited" would not be a term recognized or understood by parents and that choice would continue to be most impacted by the cost and convenience of the centre. Participants who saw accreditation as a term that parents would find meaningful also felt that this would result in increased pressure for centres to become accredited, to provide quality child care. Alongside that, they envisioned that parents would become more demanding of government funding and support of child care, as indicated by this interviewee:

> The more knowledge of quality child care that we have in the program and the more we have out in the community, the more parents will understand. Parents are becoming much better informed and it is going to be the parents in the end, because they are seeking a service. They are going to apply more pressure to the government.

Although participants had very mixed views on how accreditation would influence parents in their decision regarding child care arrangements, it was an area that had engendered their attention and interest.

Time and cost. Interviewees described the investment of time and cost as a necessary consequence of participation in accreditation. Costs that were anticipated included additional time to be invested by director and staff, as well as physical improvements to the centre, such as painting or new equipment. Additional administrative time was required to provide paperwork related to funding, policy development and communications with staff, parents and the community specifically related to accreditation.

Auspice. In Alberta, the majority of child care is commercial, for-profit business. The current government policy is that day care is an economic support to be purchased by working families rather than a family support (Hewes, 1998). There are many more commercial day care centres than not-for-profit centres in Alberta. As noted by Hewes (1998), this has tended to create many issues and divisions in the early childhood community. The accreditation system was seen as a means of ameliorating this situation by providing greater means of dialogue between programs and through providing a standard means of program comparison. Greater dialogue between programs has resulted from the involvement of organizations of both auspices in the development of the accreditation system and standards and as a result of staff from various programs coming together through the pilot project and various training provided by the accreditation agency and by ARCQE. As an example, this participant related:

> I was in these programs as part of the pilot project. I saw what they had in terms of policy and what was missing. Our centre had stuff they needed, so I said I would be more than happy to share stuff through email. I think that networking piece is important.

The consequence of auspice in itself was raised in the interviews as an issue. For owners of for-profit centres there seems to be a dilemma in values as expressed by this interviewee:

> As an owner-director, half your mind is on the business aspect, half your mind is on regulations and running the daycare. And at some point if they are not making money, there is going to be a conflict. How each of the operators deal with that, I don't know but what I'm saying is the daycare has to be able to generate enough money that the owner-director is not in conflict with some of the things that they have to do.

For nonprofits there is perhaps a need to be more business-like as suggested by this interviewee:

> I think there could be more unification of nonprofit programs to support each other so they can reduce bills, such as for payroll. Someone at the top has to make us more business minded. How would a healthy business make this successful? It is foreign to our nature as early childhood educators.

It seems there is a fine balance between being business-minded and being child-centered that both auspices strive for; in order to meet children and family needs in a caring yet effective and financially efficient manner.

The introduction of accreditation has established standards and allowed funding to be directed to child care regardless of auspice and that was seen by all but one participant as being beneficial. As noted by one of the interviewees, "Accreditation has the ability to identify both nonprofit and for-profit programs that can provide quality child care. It is what people have been asking for."

Potential for quality improvement. Most participants (9 of 16) saw accreditation as having the potential to improve the quality of child care and to create a continuous cycle of improvement. The standards established through accreditation were seen as an opportunity to reflect on and improve program practice, with a consequence of improved quality, as specified by this interviewee:

> Programs that are choosing to be accredited will be stronger, staff will be more knowledgeable, children will receive…not better care, as we offer high quality now, but more enhanced programming, because staff will be more aware of what they need, because the expectations will be higher. In the end it is going to be a good thing.

The ongoing goal of meeting accreditation standards and the gradual increase of standard requirements were perceived by participants as leading to a gradual cycle of quality improvement in Alberta. Because this system is unique within Canada, it was also seen as generating professional interest and attention from other provinces. A few interviewees did raise the concern however, that increasing quality costs money and that with increasing quality, and the cost of daycare would be beyond the reach of ordinary parents unless significant dollars were tied to the increased quality levels.

Impact on out-of-school care. Out-of-school care programs provide care before and after school and sometimes include lunch care as well. In Alberta, they are often provided through a daycare organization. Parent subsidies in daycare are provided through Alberta Children's Services, whereas in out-of-school care they are provided by Family Community Support Services, in a limited number of municipalities. Regulations for out-of-school care were minimal until new regulations were introduced in 2000 (available at http://www.qp.gov.ab.ca/documents/regs/2000_180.cfm). Although these regulations do not stipulate any training and certification standards, they do put the monitoring of out-of-school care under the jurisdiction of daycare licensing. With the introduction of wage enhancement tied to accreditation, some issues have been created in the out-of-school care area. The primary issue reported by participants was that of wage enhancement. Staff who work in out-of-school care do not qualify for the wage enhancement even if they work in a pre-accredited or accredited daycare centre. The accreditation system and standards are not applicable to out-of-school care (oosc). Although some centres (2 of 8 that provided oosc) have found funding to match the wage enhancement, others simply cannot afford to do so. Participants with out-of-school programs noted that this was causing resentment and would likely make it even more difficult to recruit staff for their out-of-school programs. One participant noted that there was a potential outcome that could occur sometime in the future:

> I guess the good news is that licensing is now involved in out-of-school care regulations. Although it is a minimal involvement, it is a step in the right direction and I think it could eventually lead to accreditation standards for out-of-school as well.

The impact on out-of-school care created by accreditation was cited as a problematic consequence of accreditation.

Further linkages and services envisioned. The implementation of standards through accreditation generated some envisioning of future consequences. These included: accredited centres becoming a community hub, providing a wide range of family services; linkage with and recognition from Alberta Education; and further investment of government dollars in daycare. One participant described the idea of the daycare centre becoming a community hub as follows:

> Accredited centres could become a neighbourhood hub, so families could come to us for a variety of services. We would need more space and we would have to go after that. We could offer additional advice to parents, offering more parenting courses, toy lending and drop-in care. This could be very successful especially in rural areas. It lead back to the quote "it takes a whole village" and we could really go back to creating that village through accreditation, if we put our minds to it.

While daycare licensing standards focus on health and safety, accreditation standards go beyond health and safety to address the learning environment provided for the child. It is this aspect that created the speculation among some (4 of 16) participants that daycares would come to be seen more as early learning centres, the place where schooling truly begins. It was hoped that this would lead to better linkages, co-operation, and support from the education system, including having accredited centres as possible sites for junior kindergarten. The words of this interviewee capture the spirit of this envisioning:

> Hopefully in the future, daycares will be linked with schools, because this is where they really start their learning. If you want to have children well educated in school, we need to start in the daycare and we need the level of staff and programming in daycares to make it more comparable to the school system. Schooling should start at 2 years of age in the daycares.

At present there is little connection between daycare centres in Alberta and the education system: separate government departments operate them. But some participants indicated that they felt accreditation standards increased the potential of daycare centres being recognized as places where education begins.

As accreditation has just been introduced in Alberta, the long-term consequences remain to be seen but participants of this study identified some consequences that have already occurred and some they believe will occur in the future.

Degree of Readiness to Enter the Accreditation Process

Background. Under the Alberta Day Care Regulations, introduced in November 1990, all day care staff must have training in early childhood education. The Day Care Staff Qualifications Office assesses, certifies and exempts day care staff in accordance with this regulation. Day Care Staff Qualifications grants three designations for caregivers that work in child care centres based on the amount of training in early childhood development.

The Level 1 Orientation Course is provided for staff with no previous coursework in early childhood development and is offered at no cost to students. This 50-hour course is intended to provide introductory training about developmentally appropriate practices when working with young children. A Level 1 may also be awarded to those who have completed course work that the Minister considers equivalent to the orientation course, such as a child development credit course offered through a recognized public college. A Level 1 is considered to be the minimum standard in order to be employed in a child care centre.

A Level 2 certificate is awarded to an individual who has completed the first year of the early childhood development or education program from a college, or has completed course work that the Minister considers to be equivalent.

A Level 3 certificate is issued to an individual who has received a two-year diploma in early childhood development or education or has completed equivalent course work as approved by the Minister. The program director in a daycare centre must hold a Level 3 certificate, but is not required to work directly with the children. Between 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at least one in every four staff must hold a Level 2 or 3 certificate and all others must hold Level 1 (Alberta Children's Services, 2000).

Exemptions are available to staff who are registered and taking early childhood courses toward their next level or if the license holder of a daycare centre has made every reasonable effort to fill the position with a qualified person. Proof of recruitment efforts is required: advertisement should be placed in a local newspaper, run for at least two weeks and include the position, certification level and salary offered. This type of exemption will be issued for a short-term only and more proof of advertisements will be required for further extensions (www.child.gov.ab.ca/whatwedo/childcare/qualifications).

Readiness of participants. The daycare centres that participated in this study ranged from those who had all Level 3 staff to those who had only the mandatory staff requirements, including some exempted staff. The directors/owners with all Level 3 staff indicated that they were in the process of self-study to become accredited, or were very close to being ready. Participants at this stage of readiness described their programs as needing some fine-tuning, as depicted by this interviewee:

> Through reviewing the whole accreditation materials, we are going to be able to enhance our program. We will be really able to fine-tune the low spots that we may have missed. We offer a wonderful program here but there are areas where we are lacking, where we can fine tune and re-evaluate.

In contrast, the directors/owners of the centres with only a minimal number of trained staff indicated they wanted to become accredited but would not be able to truly enter the process until they were able to improve their staff situation. In the words of one participant, "Lack of good Level 3 staff is the biggest barrier. To me, it is the only barrier. If all the staff is really good, all the rest is pretty solvable." This theme occurred within every interview, with directors/owners of centres with a high number of Level 3 staff indicating that their Level 3 staff was the key to their readiness to meet the accreditation standard.

This is an interesting finding, considering that the Alberta Association for the Accreditation of Early learning and Care services does not stipulate any requirement regarding the number of Level 3 staff, other than meeting licensing requirements. In daycare centres "Standard 7: The Work Environment Supports Quality Delivery" it is only stipulated "Staff have qualifications to do the work they are hired to do." (http://www.abccaccred.ca/standards.php). It is not a surprising finding, however, in terms of the research reviewed within this study. The aspects of child care identified as quality criteria in the literature review, were also the ones identified and valued from the perspective of study participants when describing strengths of their centres.

Background Issues that Impact Accreditation

Participants described many complex background factors that impacted the operation of a daycare centre in Alberta. These factors included (a) funding, (b) advocacy, (c) wages and working conditions, (d) negative public connotation of daycare, and (e) poverty.

Funding and advocacy. A history of funding decreases, closures of quality centres and the struggle for quality recognition and funding of child care in Alberta were reviewed in Chapter 2. For participants in this study, the history of advocacy was actively related to accreditation. One participant described this as follows:

> It seems for so many years we have been shouting into the wilderness: no one recognizes the efforts that go into providing really good quality child care. Now through accreditation we will get recognition for a job well done.

Ten of the sixteen interviewees indicated that accreditation and the associated funding were seen as a positive response to the struggle by advocates for recognition and funding of quality child care. Because there has been a history provincially, of funding cuts, one interviewee feared that accreditation funding might not last. Four interviewees mentioned specifically that the accountability to standards of accreditation and funding channelled through accreditation seemed to provide a logical means of funding which government could justify to the public.

Wages and working conditions. The overall situation of low staff wages, high staff turnover and poor working conditions in Alberta daycares were also cited as factors that impact accreditation. The words of this participant reflect this history of low wages and the struggle to improve the situation:

> I was part of the group that, over the past years, have been lobbying for changes. One of the changes that I was looking for was improved wages and working conditions for staff, and to make the situation such that this could be seen as a meaningful profession.

The funding to be provided through the accreditation system was seen as only partially addressing the issues of wages, staff retention and attracting new staff to the field. Interviewees were pleased to be able to offer some staff wage enhancement through the pre-accreditation funding and were looking forward to increasing that by becoming accredited. However, most of the participants (14 of 16) indicated that the increase would not truly impact the field enough to attract new people into the daycare field. In the words of this participant:

> Staff are excited to know that wages will go up once we are accredited. Is it motivating for a new graduate? No. I don't think it is enough for a new graduate to say. 'Ok, I took ECD diploma and I think the money is enough that I will stay and work in the daycare centre now.' No, I don't hear that. I hear 'See you later, I am off to university to get my teacher degree.' But for the staff that are already here and already committed to early childhood, it seems to be making an impact.

The issue of recruitment is key to the long term development of quality child care, yet ten of the participants felt the wage enhancement tied to accreditation was not enough to attract new people to the field.

The professional development fund, which is a new funding of $250 per year, available on an individual basis, also received mixed reactions. In general, it is an initiative that is appreciated but not seen as meaningful in terms of covering costs of college courses, as specified by this interviewee:

> Through accreditation initiatives, there is professional development money for each staff that works with children and staff are excited about that. I have staff that have already taken courses and now I can apply to get some money to reimburse them. I think that is nice. It's just that $250 doesn't even give you half of a course, but it helps with first aid, security clearance and it helps with the

> centre budget for education and training. I would like to see it higher, but it is a good start.

Negative public connotation of daycare. Another issue raised by participants is the lack of public recognition or understanding of quality programming in daycare and press images of daycare that lead to negative connotations of the name "daycare". Participants felt that the name "daycare" has connotations of a babysitting service rather than the educational and family service that is provided. This participant stated it this way:

> The government wants the daycare worker to be a social worker, to be a teacher, to be a health nurse. They want them to do so many things, but they don't want to pay them. So you have these many forces that are acting or fighting against each other. You have a government body that says these are the standards, that we want you to meet them; and you have an industry that says "I can't pay them that much to do that." If you want me to become a teacher, if you want me to become a social worker, if you want me to become part of social services, you have to recognize that and do something. Daycare is a misnomer. It is not daycare, it is not a babysitting service and that's what daycare suggests. We're becoming an educational and social development industry.

This issue raised by participants signifies a lack of public understanding of the skills and knowledge that are necessary to provide a quality child care program.

Poverty. Poverty evident in families that attend child care centres was another matter that concerned participants. Although half the centres (8 of 16) interviewed offered various resources and services for family support, the remainder interviewed had no resources and were not connected with any means of accessing resources. Interviewees noted that often low-income families have access only to poor quality centres that have poorly trained staff and a basic level of supervision rather than an enriched learning program. Participants felt that the very children who most need quality child care and access to a range of family services were most likely receiving the poorest quality care and no access to needed services. For those quality programs that do exist, top wages are required in order to attract staff that are trained and willing to work with children who are at risk of developmental delays and behavioural difficulties. Interviewees indicated that this is only possible by accessing funding above and beyond the parent fees. Within this area of concern was also the fact that parent fee subsidies from the provincial government have not been increased in recent years, impacting both parents and the daycare centres.

Funding, advocacy, wages and working conditions, negative public connotation of daycare, and poverty are background issues that impact the operation of daycare centres and subsequently influence their ability to meet quality standards within the accreditation system.

Perceptions of the New Accreditation System Standards

The interviews conducted for this study occurred within two to three months after the new accreditation system was introduced in Alberta. The directors/owners interviewed expressed various perceptions about this new system. Twelve participants specified that they felt very included in the development of the accreditation system and standards, while four felt they had not been included. Most (12 of 16) indicated a sense of excitement and hope connected with accreditation, as reflected in the words of this interviewee:

> I know I am very excited about it and I am hoping it is recognized. I'm hoping it is a new start for the early childhood field and us all working together and trying to do the best for the children.

Two of the interviewees believed that higher standards of quality child care could have been achieved through setting mandatory standards within licensing. Concerns were expressed about the creation of another level of bureaucracy and potential inefficiencies of a new agency. However, all of those interviewed liked the concept of an accreditation system.

Most (12 0f 16) thought that the current accreditation standards are not too high: they are achievable and they do allow room for interpretation of individual program philosophy. Five interviewees expressed nervousness about being judged and about the objectiveness of the on-site assessment. (Note: none of the programs interviewed had experienced an on-site assessment.) Although all the centres interviewed indicated that they wanted to become accredited, they felt not all programs would participate in the new system, which is voluntary. They listed various reasons why programs would not participate including: the standards are not achievable for some centres, the process is too difficult, there is not enough incentive and/or the centre staff would not support the process. Despite participants' doubts that all centres would engage in the current accreditation system, all interviewees thought that the standards would change and would be set higher in the future, as more and more centres achieved current standards. The words of this interviewee reflect this interest in future standards:

> I know they talked more about 70% as the passing rate at this time and that that will go up gradually, but I'd like to hear that the standards also would grow and

> develop more. At this time, yes, they are higher than basic licensing standards, but it's that other piece that I want to see the expansion of. Expansion of how we incorporate parents, bring in parenting programs, bring in a higher level of learning programs. I want children to have exposure to better learning through a higher level of learning through play. I'd like to see that message starting to creep in after the first year, so people don't think this is a status quo.

The introduction of this new accreditation system to Alberta has created feelings of inclusion and exclusion, excitement and hope, questions about efficiency and effectiveness and interest in future standards in the child care community. Although limited by the small number of participants, these findings contribute to the documentation of a unique period in the history of Alberta child care.

Strategies for Entering the Accreditation Process

The directors/owners interviewed were at various stages of entry in the accreditation process. Ten participants were just contemplating entry, while a six had the self-study guide and were into the stage of internal review of their standards in relation to the accreditation standards. Various strategies were proposed for engaging in the accreditation process. Reading material on quality child care was suggested as a preparatory step. Asking for help and support before and during the accreditation process was listed as an important strategy by many interviewees. Sources of support included the licensing officer, an association with other centres, and contacting the Alberta Resource Centre for Quality Enhancement (ARCQE). This new agency has been set up specifically to support centres in the accreditation process as well as to develop Parent Link centres. The use of the ECERS-R, ITERS or other environmental assessment tools was proposed as a means for ongoing program evaluation, reflection and improvement. Designing a plan of action and leading, motivating, and/or coaching staff, parents and others was seen as a crucial strategy. Providing staff with specific opportunities to understand accreditation, through staff meetings, workshops and delegation of tasks was identified as an important element within the plan of action.

Forming an accreditation committee of staff, parents and others was also seen as an essential means of disseminating information and delegating tasks related to the accreditation bid. Another strategy was use of the parts of the self-study guide, provided through the accreditation agency as working documents as detailed by this interviewee:

> We wanted to involve as many people as possible, staff particularly. So what we did was looked at it and assigned pieces of it. For example, the checklist for review of physical space was given to two staff that would go in and evaluate that.

Where directors/owners operated more than one child care centre, going through the entire accreditation process in one centre was specified as a learning opportunity that would enhance their capability to proceed in other centres. There is little in the current literature on child care accreditation that speaks to strategies to facilitate the accreditation process: these findings contribute some initial ideas in that area.

Uniqueness of Findings

Findings of this study are not unique, in the sense that research (see for example Goelman et al., 2000) has already identified the importance of trained competent staff, the importance of leadership, the importance of supportive connections and the importance of centre attributes in program quality. Consequences of accreditation in terms of potential for quality improvement versus time, cost, impact on staff and parents were also themes identified in the literature review. What is unique about this study is that it is an initial exploration of the response to the implementation of accreditation in Alberta.

The Alberta context. The findings relative to auspice issues, impact on out-of-school care, and envisioning further linkages and services are unique to this study. These themes deserve further attention and exploration. It is possible that these themes are unique to the Alberta context. Alberta has a high percentage of for-profit centres, a strong link between child care centres and out-of-school care and only a small percentage of centres that are linked with education and health support systems.

Empowerment. The findings suggest that accreditation has introduced a new sense of hope and professionalism into the child care field in Alberta, alongside a realistic concern that introduction of higher standards of practice require a greater level of funding to provide a supportive infrastructure which would enable a wealth of competent, well trained, well paid staff to carry out those standards.

This study indicates that accreditation seems to be engendering a sense of personal and professional empowerment in the child care field. Public recognition and related funding does not seem to be readily forthcoming, as acknowledged in the following quote. "The Canadian public seems to value the importance of early childhood development, but remains ambivalent about respecting the child care workforce and about translating respect into public investment" (Bertrand, Beach, Michal & Tougas, 2004, p. 13). Yet, accreditation seems to provide a vehicle for quality recognition within the field itself, so that there is at least an internal opportunity to seek and gain recognition of the efforts of directors and staff who want to demonstrate that their programs provide better quality than that required by licensing.

Sense of hope. The introduction of a new system of standards and funding has introduced a renewed sense of hope in the daycare field. The words of this participant reflect this feeling: "There is a real sense of excitement in the field, a sense of hope arising from the implementation of accreditation. I am happy the government started to think about accreditation. Because before, a lot of people were talking and talking about the importance of daycare but doing nothing to improve it."

Sense of professionalism. The standards provided through the accreditation system may be contributing to a growing professionalism. As stated by Fromberg (2003); "In a sense, professionalism is not a democratic concept because it limits entry into its ranks. As an exclusive expertise, professional practice separates the professional from ordinary life and action" (p. 179). A core body of unique knowledge, skills and wisdom is needed to be considered a professional (Fromberg, 2003, Mayfield, 2001). It seems that being able to work together as individuals within a centre towards the achievement of a set of quality standards gives staff and directors/owners an opportunity to reflect on their professional practice and may contribute to a growing sense of professionalism.

This study provides a basis of further exploration of the connection between the establishment of centre standards and the sense of empowerment and developing professionalism.

Limitations of This Study

The Alberta Association for Accreditation of Early Learning and Care Services is mandated to accredit licensed family day homes as well as daycare centres. Since family day homes have a different context in terms of regulations, funding sources and training systems, they have not been included in this study, although the literature review does include some information relative to both types of child care program. Even though information from day home providers would broaden this study, I felt it was beyond the scope of my personal resources to include the number of interviews necessary to collect data from both types of programs. Rural child care centres were also not part of this study, because I did not have the time and personal resources to dedicate to a reasonable rural sample. This research is limited in scope by the topic, which is of a very local and specific nature, and limitation to a sample of daycare directors/owners in urban centres. Although every attempt was made to bracket my own knowledge and interest in the area of child care accreditation, the study is also limited by the possibility of personal bias, as detailed in the methods section: role of the researcher.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS ISSUES RAISED

Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings and proposes some strategies to address issues raised. Meaningful incentives and supportive infrastructure need to be provided to child care directors/owners in Alberta to motivate them to successfully participate in the accreditation process. The results indicate that directors/owners are motivated by personal desire to provide quality child care, the public recognition and status afforded by achieving the accreditation certificate, and most importantly, by financial incentives tied to accreditation. This chapter begins by addressing importance of funding and addresses some key elements of infrastructure. The availability of competent staff, trained in early childhood, is an essential component of infrastructure. The notion of centre synergy and the need for community connection and support are also deserving of attention. The next section discusses the consequences of accreditation that were found to be both positive and negative. The chapter concludes with practical strategies that were proposed by participants as they began the accreditation journey.

The Importance of Financial Incentives

Many centres (10 of 16) indicated that it is their mission to provide quality care, regardless of whether accreditation exists of not. However, even these centres expressed the need for the financial contributions tied to accreditation. As stated by Gormley and Lucas (2000):

> Money is not the only way to motivate child care staff or other businesspersons, but it is of special interest to an industry that is starved for cash and plagued by high staff turnover (p. 4).

Government funding and support of accreditation is essential, but accreditation also opens up new avenues of funding. Consider the following example from Missouri:

> In the summer of 1996, Heart of America United Way made a commitment to assist its 17 funded early childhood programs to achieve accreditation by the National Association for the Education of Young Children. The success of this initiative, along with the increasing momentum in the community around improving quality care and education, led to the expansion of the initiative in 1998 to include non-United Way programs. At that time, Partners in Quality for Early Childhood Care and Education (PIQ), a collaboration of business and civic entities, established as one of its goals the accreditation of 100 programs in the metropolitan area by the end of 2002. Furthermore, PIQ committed to having 400 of the over 500 area programs nationally accredited by 2010. Heart of America United Way sought national funding from the Bank of America Foundation/Success by six Enhancement Initiative and local funding from the Francis Families Foundation, the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, the Hall Family Foundation and the State of Missouri. A total of $2.3 million has been raised to date to assist programs in the 5-county area with this goal (*Community Initiatives*, 2003).

In this example, local business, local foundations, local civic entities and the United Way came together to support early childhood programs in seeking NAEYC accreditation.

Making visible the goals of high quality care is made possible through the vehicle of accreditation. In partnership with government, the accreditation body and the child care community can work together, over time, to identify possible funding partners for Alberta accreditation.

Infrastructure

Increasing the Number/Availability of Staff Trained in Early Childhood

Having staff trained in early childhood who were deemed capable of working with the centre's philosophy was seen as the most essential ingredient needed to support to accreditation. This finding points to the importance of process variables, within the indicators of quality care, as described in research (see Clarke- Stewart et al., 2002; Doherty-Derkowski, 1995; Frede, 1995; Marcon, 2002; Peth-Pierce, 1998). It is the process of what occurs in the daily life of the young child in child care that is most impacted by trained, competent early childhood staff. A shortage of capable, qualified staff was presented as the greatest barrier to accreditation. The financial incentives provided through the new system were seen as helpful but not meaningful enough to attract new staff to the field or to motivate less qualified staff working in the field to take college courses toward gaining a higher level of certification. Strategies for ensuring skilled and qualified people enter and remain in the child care workforce recommended in *Working for change: Canada's child care workforce* (Bertrand et al., 2004): increased pay and benefits; developing recruitment and retention strategies; improving leadership practices; and fostering partnerships with education and research communities and government departments. To address the shortage of qualified staff, recommendations from *You Bet I Care* (Goelman et al., 2000) are as follows:

1. Colleges and institutions providing early childhood education remove barriers to obtaining credentials by providing distance delivery through various formats such as correspondence and internet, as well as on-site programs for full and part time students; and supervised practicum within reasonable distance for the study.
2. Scholarships, bursaries and loans need to be designed and provided by the provincial government to support those already in working in child care to pursue a higher level of qualification/certification and to attract new people into the child care field. The current $250 professional funding is commendable but does not support the cost of pursuing a college degree.
3. The provincial government should continue and expand on the wage enhancement initiatives provided through pre-accreditation and accreditation funding.

Alongside these recommendations, another strategy to increase the number of certified staff would be to re-address the certification requirements in Alberta, to consider whether equivalencies currently granted could be expanded and if they might consider Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR). PLAR is a means to identify and assess knowledge and skills gained through various life experiences according to specific requirements and expectations (Bertrand, 2004). A commitment to fund training initiatives, student incentives and provide improved wages, benefits and working conditions are required to attract and retain a well-trained, qualified and professional workforce.

Importance of Centre Synergy

The results of this study indicate that there were four areas that formed the major supports and/or barriers to seeking accredited status in the new accreditation system: staff, leadership, connections, and centre attributes An underlying theme that arose from analysis was the notion of centre synergy, the way all these factors work together. Within these areas, leadership appeared as a crucial ingredient that establishes the organizational culture, supports center connections, and builds centre attributes. This finding supports the importance of the leadership role as noted in research (see Frede, 1995; Hatherly, 1999; Jorde-Bloom, 1992). Having the ability to be a leader and facilitate an organizational culture that values quality child care can be fostered through advanced training in leadership and administration. This type of educational requirement for program directors is recommended in *You Bet I Care* (Goelman et al., 2000).

The Need for Connections and Support

The background issues described by directors/owners were those cited by Hewes (1998) within the literature review of this study. They include: a history of strong advocacy for quality child care in Alberta, with minimal government response; a policy of child care as an economic need for families versus a family support; low level of training requirements, poor wages and working conditions; issues created by auspice; isolation of daycares from each other and from needed services; and issues of poverty that impact both the families that use daycare services and the daycares themselves. The implementation of accreditation was seen as a positive response to the concerns of advocates for quality child care and a means of addressing auspice issues and decreasing isolation within the child care community. However, not all centres have experienced or are aware of these child care connections yet and accreditation was not seen as addressing isolation from other community connections which would support the need for family and child supports such as assessment, referral, counselling, food, shelter and so on. As noted by Hewes and Brown (2002):

> Many child care programs already serve a significant portion of low-income, single-parent, working-poor families headed by women, whose children are presenting with health and mental health issues, challenging behaviour and developmental delays. (p. 6).

Those centres interviewed who were able to offer these types of family support services, through various funding avenues, cited these as important services that contributed to the quality of their program and their ability to become accredited. This is an area that needs to be addressed as it impacts on the quality of the centre and the ability to become accredited if supports are not available.

Positive Consequences Identified

A Sense of Empowerment and Hope

The findings suggest that accreditation has introduced a new sense of empowerment, hope and professionalism into the child care field in Alberta, alongside a realistic concern that introduction of higher standards of practice require supportive infrastructure. The growing sense of hope may have positive consequences because hope is an important ingredient in the lives of both adults and young children. There is a cultural and social bias favouring hope because hope relieves suffering and is used by powerful people to foster order (Nesse, 1999). Positive results of hopeful thinking have been related to health outcomes (Scioli et al., 1997), academic success (Onwuegbuzie &

Daley, 1999), athletics and coping (Snyder, Cheavens, & Michaels, 1999), to name a few. It is also essential as a coping resource against despair (Lazarus, 1999). The ability to hope has many beneficial effects.

Building the Future

Consequences of accreditation as seen from the perspective of selected daycare directors/owners were similar to those that have been identified in literature (see for example Bredekamp & Glowacki, 1996). The impact on parents was a highly debated topic, but interviewees indicated it was an important aspect of accreditation. It is recommended that both child care programs and government play a role in the education of parents regarding the meaning of accredited status. Accreditation requires an investment of time, cost and professional commitment. Participants indicated that these demands were somewhat offset by the financial incentives provided.

The negative impact on the out-of-school field and the recruitment of highly trained and experienced staff into consulting and monitoring positions such as those with ARCQE and the Alberta Association for Accreditation of Early Learning and Care Services has created some fracturing of the early childhood community that needs to be addressed by the Alberta Child Care Network in collaboration with Alberta Children's Services. This type of collaboration would also facilitate the development of strategies to pursue the positive outcomes envisioned by participants, such as linkages to Alberta Education and empowering accredited centres to act as community hubs, providing a range of family services. In order to develop and implement an effective accreditation system for Alberta, the contextual issues and demands of the accreditation process need to be addressed. Forming partnerships with both the government sector and the child care sector will build on existing resources, supports, and infrastructure.

Addressing Negative Consequences

Keep the Network Growing

The introduction of a new system has also created some feelings of exclusion for centres included and consulted in the development of accreditation. The Alberta Child Care Network is an association of child care agencies that undertook the development of accreditation alongside the Canadian Child Care Federation. Although they had representation and support from every active child care organization and from stakeholders throughout the province, some centres (4 of 16 interviewed) were simply not affiliated with any of these organizations. A strategy to address this situation and include more centres in its activities is recommended.

Avoiding Bureaucracy and Ensuring Programs Use Available Supports

Another criticism of accreditation was that it creates another level of bureaucracy, and it is simply an extension of licensing. One clear difference between the two is that accreditation is voluntary: centres are not forced to participate and it puts the onus on the centre to put thought and commitment into developing policies and practice that will support a quality care environment. All participants in this study indicated that they would like their centre to become accredited, but some (4 of 16) indicated that it is not possible for them to meet the standards at this time. Supports toward attaining the higher standards of accreditation are being provided in the form of pre-accreditation funding, professional development funding and through ARQCE, which provides consultation and mentoring. It is these benefits that need to be emphasized by both Children's Services and the Alberta Association for Accreditation of Early Learning and Care Services, through various means of communication, in order to dispel program concerns.

Practical Strategies Identified

Practical strategies for engaging in the accreditation process were identified by participants. These strategies include:

1. Read material on quality child care as a preparatory step.
2. Ask for help and support before and during the accreditation.
3. The use of the ECERS-R, ITERS or other environmental assessment tools as a means for ongoing program evaluation, reflection and improvement.
4. Designing a plan of action and leading, motivating, and/or coaching staff, parents and others.
5. Providing staff with specific opportunities to understand accreditation, through staff meetings, workshops and delegation of tasks.
6. Forming an accreditation committee of staff, parents and others as a means of disseminating information and delegating tasks related to the accreditation bid.
7. Activate parts of the self-study guide, provided through the accreditation agency, as working documents for staff and others.
8. Where directors/owners operated more than one child care centre, going through the entire accreditation process in one centre provides a learning opportunity to enhance capability to proceed in other centres.

These strategies may prove beneficial to programs considering accreditation and to consultants working with programs to facilitate the accreditation process.

CHAPTER 7: IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH AND CONCLUSION

Implications for Further Research

Although this study was limited to the perceptions of urban daycare directors/owners in the implementation phase of the Alberta accreditation program, it provides some insights on the Alberta accreditation system, which may contribute to the literature on accreditation in general. A follow-up of participants in this study would be a further study that could contribute qualitative evidence of the supports and barriers encountered in the process daycare directors/owners go through as they actually implement and follow through the whole accreditation process. In order to understand the whole picture in Alberta, it would also be valuable to expand this study by including rural child care centres and family day home agencies, as well as the perspective of various stakeholders such as licensing staff, child care staff, parents and the community. It would be interesting to use the base findings of this study to develop a more comprehensive survey that could be distributed to all staff and directors across the province.

The emergence of professionalism as an issue, the envisioning of a possible link with Alberta Education, combined with the focus on the need for a stable, well trained workforce suggest an investigation of ways child care programs can become more regulated and linked to funding. An in-depth review of the parallels and differences between the history of education and the history of child care in Canada and Alberta would contribute to an understanding of how philosophy, policy, funding and professional differences have evolved, and if there could be a possible convergence in the future.

Conclusion

The implementation of child care accreditation in Alberta was based on the belief that it will improve the standards of child care practice, providing the children who attend optimal opportunities for development. The present study has attempted to address this by exploring Alberta child care accreditation within the context of its development, shedding light on supports needed for its successful implementation. The end goal of accreditation is to provide young children with an optimal child care experience. It is a tool to be used by child care programs to identify what they do well, and what aspects of their program need improvement. Through use of this tool, programs are able to demonstrate their commitment to providing quality child care. For parents and the public, accreditation offers a means of identifying programs that provide quality care, and it affords an assurance that the program is providing a nurturing atmosphere and appropriate learning opportunities for children. However, if only a small number of programs become accredited, the benefits of accreditation will not be widely recognized and will not have meaning to the public. To attract full participation of child care programs, the accreditation system must offer meaningful incentives and a supportive infrastructure.

The road to quality child care is not an easy one. For the economic and political realities of Alberta, accreditation seems to be a vehicle that can pull both the child care community and the public in a supportive direction. The quest for quality child care is a journey worth taking, for our children and our children's children.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The main question that guided this study was: What is occurring, for daycare directors/owners, as they respond to the implementation of accreditation? After reviewing the purpose of my research and the obtaining of informed consent, this interview will began by obtaining the following background information:

Year of experience in the child care field

Type/Level of education

Auspice of child care centre

Size of centre

Number of staff within the centre

Type/ Level of staff education

The main question guiding this study was: What supports or barriers are faced by daycare directors/owners, as they respond, whether positively or negatively, to the implementation of accreditation? (Directors/owners who have no interest or knowledge of the accreditation system were not included in the study). To address this question: I began the interview with the following: "I am interested in hearing your story about the complexities of the environment in which accreditation is to take place. Tell me about your response to the Alberta accreditation program."

Additional questions that support the main question were also posed:

- What is your understanding of the accreditation process?
- What existing strengths do you feel your program incorporates? Are these recognized in the accreditation system?

- What barriers exist that would prevent your centre from attaining accredited status?
- What will motivate you and other child care directors to participate in the accreditation program?
- What type of supports do you think your centre would require achieving accreditation status?
- What will enable you to initiate changes necessary to achieve accredited status?
- What advice would you have for someone beginning the accreditation process?
- Is there anything else I should know about accreditation that I did not ask?

APPENDIX B: INFORMATION AND CONSENT

Outline of Verbal Description of Research

To be presented at the Alberta Child Care Network Meeting

Self introduction

My name is Margaret Golberg. I am a student at the University of Alberta, doing my Master's Degree, in the Faculty of Education. I am conducting a research study on child care accreditation in Alberta. I am attending the Alberta Child Care Network meeting because I would like to invite you and members of your child care organizations to be participants in this research.

Introducing the purpose

The purpose of this study is to discover what meaningful incentives and supports need to be provided to child care directors/owners to motivate them to successfully participate in the accreditation process. The study aims to identify the response of child care directors/owners, to accreditation as it is introduced in Alberta. This study will describe what barriers are being encountered and what supports child care programs moving toward accreditation status require, from the perspective of child care directors/owners.

Identifying parameters of the sample

I will only be conducting interviews of daycare directors/owners in urban areas. I do not have the resources available to include day homes and rural area daycares.

Some centres will be prepared and ready for the accreditation process before it is even in place. Other centres will be informed about accreditation and want to engage in the process, but not be at all ready to do so. These two types of centre directors/owners will are needed as key informants in understanding the accreditation process from the perspective of a centre director/owner. Through this Network, I hope to identify participants who fall into one of these two types of centres and are willing to be interviewed.

Introducing parameters of participation

If you, or anyone within your child care organization, were willing to participate, I would conduct an interview, which would probably take between one and two hours. I will conduct the interview at a time and location that is convenient to the participant. I am interested in hearing director's/owner's stories about the complexities of the environment in which accreditation is to take place.

Obtaining permission to conduct the interview and contact information

If you would know of suitable participants for my research study, please take a number of my business cards and give them to potential participants. Have them contact me directly to indicate to ask for further information and/or to indicate interest in participation.

Providing information about the interview process

Once a participant contacts me, I will review with them the purpose of the research and arrange for an interview if they are willing to participate. When I come, I will be bringing a letter of information about my research for review. I will also bring a consent form to sign, which reviews my obligations to protect the confidentiality information that I obtain. I plan to tape interviews, to capture information for analysis.

For telephone contact

Self introduction

Hello, my name is Margaret Golberg. I am a student at the University of Alberta, doing my Master's Degree, in the Faculty of Education. I am conducting a research study on child care accreditation in Alberta. I am contacting you because I would like to invite you to be a participant in this research.

Introducing the purpose

The purpose of this study is to discover what meaningful incentives and supportive infrastructure need to be provided to child care directors/owners to motivate them to successfully participate in the accreditation process. The study aims to identify the response of child care directors/owners to accreditation as it is introduced in Alberta. This study will describe what barriers are being encountered and what supports child care programs moving toward accreditation status require, from the perspective of child care directors/owners.

Introducing parameters of participation

If you were willing to participate, I would conduct an interview, which would probably take between one and two hours. I will conduct the interview at a time and location that is convenient to you. I am interested in hearing your story about the complexities of the environment in which accreditation is to take place.

Obtaining permission to conduct the interview

Do you think you would like to participate in my research study? *If yes:* what would be a time and location convenient for you?

Providing information about the interview process

When I come, I will be bringing a letter of information about my research for you to review. I will also bring a consent form for you to sign, which review my obligations to protect the confidentiality information that I obtain from you. I will be bringing a tape recorder, so that I can capture your information for further analysis.

Providing contact information

You may decide that you do not wish to participate, or that the time we have agreed needs to be changed. So, I would like to leave you my name and number:
Margaret Golberg

Information Letter

Dear Centre Director/Owner:

As a Master's candidate, in the Faculty of Education, at the University of Alberta, I am conducting research toward completion of my degree and would like to invite you to be a participant in this research.

In April 2004, Alberta Child Care Services will be implementing the Alberta Child Care Accreditation program. My study aims to identify the response of child care directors/owners, to accreditation as it is introduced in Alberta. The purpose of this study is to discover what meaningful incentives and supportive infrastructure need to be provided to child care directors/owners, to help them to successfully participate in the accreditation process. I am interested in hearing your story about the complexities of the environment in which accreditation is to take place. Your participation in an interview will help me explore this new phenomenon, child care accreditation in Alberta, within the context of its development. Results of this research will be used to complete my Master's thesis. A summary of my thesis will be shared with every participant that I interview. This research also has potential value contribute to the implementation of the Alberta Child Care Accreditation Program by identifying some of the ways support can be provided to child care programs to support participation in the accreditation process. I hope to share knowledge gained through this research though presentations, and published articles.

I am asking for your participation in an interview lasting approximately one to two hours in length. Interviews will be conducted at a time and location convenient to you. It is also likely that I will need to contact you as the study develops, to verify my understanding of the information you provide.

Your participation is voluntary. Individual responses will be held confidential. At no time will individual names be associated with responses, unless written consent is obtained. You may withdraw from the study at any time; in which case, your information will be excluded from the study. My contact information is listed at the bottom of this letter; please feel free to contact me should you with to withdraw from the research, or have any further comments, questions or concerns about this research.

Information obtained during the interview will be locked in my home office. Participants will be given an alias and descriptors used sparingly to protect individual identity. Electronic data will be stored on a password-protected computer. Data will be retained for a five year period, after which time it will be destroyed by shredding of paper and destruction of electronic data.

I hope that you will benefit from involvement in the study. It is an opportunity to share your experience and opinions with an interested party. Involvement in this study provides an opportunity for you to reflect on your knowledge about child care accreditation and about the context of your child care centre's strengths and limitations.

Sincerely,

Margaret Golberg

Consent Form

Project title: Preparing for Child Care Accreditation in Alberta

I, ____, hereby consent to be
Please print name
interviewed and tape recorded.

I understand that:
- My participation is voluntary.
- I may withdraw from the research at any time without penalty.
- All information gathered will be treated confidentially and ethically. Research procedures will conform to the University of Alberta Ethical Standards.
- I will not be identified in any documents resulting from this research without giving my written consent.
- I may be contacted in person or by phone within two months to clarify or expand on statements made during the interview.

I also understand that results of this research will be used for:
- Partial fulfillment of Master's degree thesis being undertaken by Margaret Golberg. Supervision of this thesis is the responsibility of Dr. Christina Rinaldi
- Presentations and publications

____ ________________________
Signature Date

APPENDIX C: DATA ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK

Main Index

The following index was created as a framework to organize data for analysis. Index topics were based on the questions posed and themes that arose as the interviews progressed. (See Ritchie & Spencer, 1994, and Lacey & Luff, 2001 for further details on the indexing, charting and mapping procedures of framework analysis).

1. Importance of staff trained in early childhood

2. Complexities of the Alberta child care environment

3. Patterns of director/owner response to accreditation

4. Patterns of preparation

5. Patterns of staff response to accreditation

7. Patterns of program strengths

6. Barriers described

8. Patterns of motivation

9. Supports described

10. Patterns of initiating change

11. Patterns of entering the process

12. Thoughts on the standards of the accreditation system

13. Parents

14. Real and Potential Consequences

15. Visions for the Future

Charting

Charting involves drawing up charts of key subject areas and grouping key characteristics according to patterns identified as being significant, based on the interview response (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). In this study, analysis was carried out for each indexed theme, across all respondents. The original reference is numbered, to enable tracing of the data back to the source. The charts included here do not reflect all the index themes, but rather the ones where contrasting patterns became evident.

Chart 1. Supports and Barriers

1a. Staff

SUPPORTS	BARRIERS
5.2 Majority of staff meet center criteria of capability and are Level 3.	1.5 Environment of low wages, poor working conditions result in high turnover, and fracturing of the field
5.5 Staff work well as a team	6.2 Lack of trained, capable staff
5.6 Staff have been with center a long time	6.10 High turnover of staff and ownership
	2.7 Concern that center may not be able to maintain accredited status due to staff turnover

1b. Leadership and Organizational Culture

SUPPORTS	BARRIERS
5.4, 9.3 Leadership approach, expectations	
9.11, 10.2 Confident attitude of leader	6.11 Fear of failure
9.4 Leader has education and experience in EC	6.4 Lack of knowledge or commitment to early childhood
5.11 Center has established, written policy	6.6 Center has no written policy
3.6, 11.4 Leader has a plan of action and delegates/involves others	
5.10 Philosophy of continual improvement; organizational culture of quality 9.5 Synergy of the organization	
5.12 Center has policy supporting further education toward level 2 and 3	

8.1 Leader does not work in ratio in the center	6.3 Director works in ratio
8.2 Staff have regular paid planning time	
8.4 ECE staff focus on children; support staff cover other center needs	6.3 No support staff
9.6 Good communication	6.12 Poor working relationship with staff
8.7 Good working conditions	
5.3 Family support part of program philosophy and service	

1c. Connections

SUPPORT	BARRIER
5.14 Involvement in accreditation agency through being part of consultations, pilot project or part of validator/moderator training	6.7 Feeling of not being consulted, not included in development of accreditation 2.8 Releasing staff to become validators/moderators difficult
8.8 Center belongs to group that has advocated and demonstrated quality child care	6.12 Center isolated: i.e. not part of group
8.9 Outside agencies provide programs and supports within the center	
9.2 Center management is not afraid to seek help	
8.3 Outreach worker onsite or easily accessible, who supports family needs and community connections	
15.15, 8.5 Funding sources in addition to parent fees; center part of a larger agency 9.8 Reaccredidation and accreditation funding	
5.7 Center has been operating a long time, seen as part of the community/neighbourhood.	
5.13 Support of families, volunteers, Board of Directors	6.9 Difficulty getting support of families and/or community
2.5, 2.12 Positive perception of accreditation, as positive response to child care community concerns	2.5, 2.9, 2.10 Negative perception of accreditation: seen as more bureaucracy, rushed introduction

1d. Center Attributes

SUPPORT	BARRIER
5.7 Program, curriculum	

5.8 Number of children per room	
5.9 Design, location or size of facility	6.5 Changes to physical design of center not possible
1.10 good toys and equipment	6.10 Poor toys and equipment

Chart 2. Consequences

POSITVE CONSEQUENCES	NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES
12.3 Parents will use accredited status in selection of child care: increase pressure on child care programs to provide quality care	12.4 Parents will not use accredited status: cost and location more important
12.1 Parents will become more demanding of government funding and support of child care	
2.3, 4.1, 1.6 Accreditation provides opportunity for EC staff to be seen as professionals, for the delivery of child care services to be seen as having professional standards	13.8 Staff are expected to work extra unpaid time to facilitate accreditation process
4.2, 4.4, 4.3 Staff view accreditation as a challenge they are ready for; feel excited about it; want the wage enhancement	4.5 Some staff oppositional to change 4.6 Staff nervous about being judged 13.8, 13.9 More work, higher expectations placed on staff
13.1 Accreditation may lead to stronger linkage and recognition from AB Education	
13.2 Accredited centers will become more of a community hub. Providing a wider range of community services	
2.13, 13.3 Opportunity for reflective practice. A cycle of continuous improvement will occur within child care programs and the Accreditation Agency 13.12 Accreditation is unique to Alberta, a move of interest to other EC professionals in Canada	2.11 Concern that cost of quality will put daycare beyond the reach of ordinary families
13.4, 13.11 Accreditation will lead to greater dialogue between, less isolation of child care programs	
13. 5 Staff will want to work in accredited centers	13.5 Staff will not be informed, aware of accreditation
13.6 Accreditation will lead to further investment of government dollars	
13. 7 Accreditation will improve program quality	11.2 Not all programs will participate 13.9 A lot of time has to be invested to

	work through the accreditation process 13.13 More paperwork, more splintering of duties within center
13.10 Out-of-school will have increasing standards and eventually come under the accreditation system	13.10 Out-of-school care is negatively impacted; further fracturing of the field
7.4 Accreditation has started new funding to licensed daycares and day homes in AB	2.1 Concern that accreditation funding will not last 1.4, 2.2, 2.6 The new funding is not enough to educate, attract and retain qualified staff

Chart 3. Motivation

Why want to be accredited	Why do not want to be accredited
7.1 Director/owner has been actively involved in advocacy	
7.1 Desire to provide quality care	11.2 Standards are not attainable for poor quality centers, some centers simply choose not to participate
7.2 Provision of quality child care viewed as children's right	
7.3 Public recognition of being a quality center	12.4 Parents will not understand, recognize "accredited' as means of choosing child care
7.4, 4.3 Want to get the funding connected with accreditation	1.5, 2.2, 2.4 Funding tied to accreditation is not enough to educate/retain current staff or attract new people to the field
1.2 Accreditation standards build a standard means of identifying quality, whether the center is non-profit or for-profit. Takes away from the auspice debate.	